LEADERS STEWARDING GIFT THROUGH GRIEF: DEVELOPING HEALTHY HABITS FOR HEALTHY MINISTRIES

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ABSTRACT

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The context is St. John Church Unleashed in Grand Prairie, Texas. The project aims to help leaders understand the importance of stewarding gifts through grief. If leaders participate in a six-week study on stewarding gifts through grief, they will exhibit leadership skills that foster personal and ministerial growth. This qualitative research project will last for six to eight weeks. Through surveys, lessons, discussions, and journal entries, participants will be introduced to concepts and methods to navigate grief. Participants will then prayerfully consider examining their leadership methods and will make necessary adjustments to foster growth in their respective ministry areas.

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To my family and friends, especially my mother, Mellie Brandon, and father, Darrell Fielder, Sr., your unwavering encouragement and support throughout my life have proven to be the sustaining source I needed to make it this far. I love you all.

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To my mentors, Dr. Jamison Hunter and Dr. George Parks, Jr., thank you. Your encouragement not only to start this journey but also your consistent commitment to my completion of it have proven invaluable. Without you, this would not be possible. This body of work is a testament to your dedication to nurturing those you see potential in, and to be regarded as such is a high honor.

To my K.A.M., from the bottom of my heart, thank you. Your love, encouragement, prayers, corrections, and support throughout this journey have been life changing. They were all necessary for my survival and success.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Sallie Lee and James Earl Steptoe. Although you are not here to witness it, your little DJ has done everything possible to make you proud. This is for you.

INTRODUCTION

Discipleship is a vital component of church growth and development. It is essentially the building block of any church or ministry. Without a strong presence of discipleship, there may be members present, but those members will not experience the growth and maturity needed to follow the commandment to make disciples. One cannot make what they have not been made. The unfortunate truth for many churches is that there is little to no discipleship due to the alarming fact that many ministry leaders, including pastors, have never been discipled. They were simply thrust into ministry roles based on their gifts but were never mentored by anyone. This leads to personal practices that harm the ministries they lead. Until this alarming truth is addressed and corrected, many churches will face decay and decline in ministry participation and growth. To tackle these issues, leaders must first acknowledge that they have mishandled episodes and seasons of grief in their personal lives. The grievous experiences vary, from the death of a loved one or cherished member to losing a secular job, failed relationships, the loss of possessions, and many others. Simply put, leaders have not learned how to steward their God-given gifts through these life seasons. While Jesus provides the ultimate model for stewarding gifts through grief, other biblical characters display behaviors and practices that can be studied and applied by leaders to facilitate positive change in their actions. This research, consisting of several chapters, will provide biblical, historical,

theological, and interdisciplinary foundations that can help develop the tools needed for leaders to steward grief well and experience personal and ministerial growth.

Chapter One provides the background and foundation for this research. It offers a glimpse into the context, The St John Church Unleashed, where the problem of a lack of discipleship is evident in the health of the church and its ministries. This issue is not confined to the St John Church but can be observed throughout the universal church at large. This chapter highlights the importance of the focus of the research.

Chapter Two provides a biblical foundation that explores the life of Joseph in the book of Genesis, who experiences grief throughout his life but develops a tone and tenor that leaders should seek to emulate and share with those they are charged to lead. Joseph's narrative concludes with him at the peak of success, and he offers words to his brothers that demonstrate his personal growth and maturity through the grief he faced, even at their hands. His statement suggests that he had a proper perspective on what he encountered and what his purpose or gift was. This chapter endeavors to provide a practical look at the behavior and spiritual posture of a gifted leader experiencing personal grief while navigating spiritual development.

The third chapter examines the life of Horatio Spafford, a successful businessman and gifted hymn writer who, through grievous periods of life, found himself focusing on what he believed he was called to do: help others. In both his personal life and spiritual journal, Spafford offered aid to those in need even at times when he himself was in dire need. Despite the loss of property and children, he was able to meet the physical needs of others, as well as offer solace through the writing of a hymn, It Is Well, that has spoken to the spiritual needs of people for decades.

In Chapter Four, the theological foundations for the research are addressed by examining Theodicy, the theology of suffering. This theological concept seeks to answer the question of what suffering is and why God allows suffering. The answer to these questions ultimately brings glory to God, even at the expense of God's people experiencing seasons or episodes of suffering. For leaders to properly manage grief, they must first understand why grief is possible and present in their lives. Mishandling the meaning or purpose of an event or series of events can cause the leader to respond in ways that inflict more damage than development.

The following chapter adopts a scientific approach to the issue by exploring the concept of Cognitive Behavior Therapy. This branch of psychotherapy addresses how people perceive and respond to their surroundings and experiences. It aims to provide cognitive practices that enable individuals to think through their responses positively, with minimal traces of irrational predispositions. When applied, this therapy can help a person properly examine difficult periods and process them in healthy ways, not only naturally but also spiritually. It contends that a lack of spirituality in positive mental practices can be detrimental to leaders and ultimately the church.

The final chapter (six) offers a project analysis that employs qualitative methods to integrate ideas from previous chapters. By providing weekly assessments and journaling opportunities, participants had the chance to personally discuss what was covered in the project sessions. The analysis addresses challenges encountered during the project, how the project was received, and whether participants exhibited signs of understanding and even growth toward the desired outcome of the overall project.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

My ministry journey has not been one that many would consider normal. I do not come from a long line of preachers in my family. I grew up in a home that went to church, but the church never quite made it home. Coming from parents who struggled with drug use and delinquencies in moral behavior, one would not have deemed me as a candidate fit for ministry. As I have journeyed these last thirteen years of life and ministry, I can affirm the age-old saying of the black church, God does not call the qualified, but He does qualify the called. I wrestled with the idea of being called to ministry for a little over five years until it became too overwhelming for me to run or carry the burden of running from it. It was at a time in my life when I was searching within myself for a purpose in life. Sure, I was what some would call an accomplished musician, but that was not scratching the surface of the itch that I had nagging my mind and spirit. It was not until I yielded and submitted to the call that God began to show me my purpose in the earth. "When God is revealing bits and pieces of your purpose through the seasons of your life, remember that even if He has told you how you will ultimately serve Him, it does not mean that the fulfillment of your purpose will happen in a

straight line. Instead, you might feel like you are going in loop-de-loops and circles, like you are wandering."[1]

That purpose over these years afforded me the privilege to serve in some capacity in the shadow of great pastors and denominational leaders. Serving as minister of music at the Mt. Zion Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa taught me the importance of integral church administration. Only a month after agreeing to move to Mt. Zion to serve the church, they experienced a historic flooding which led to them losing their church building. Upon my arrival, I was thrust into hands-on ministry with the newly elected pastor, Dr. Damian Epps. Being blessed to see ministry in this light ignited my desire to do the work of ministry. I learned there that it goes far beyond the preaching and teaching moments which are often the most highlighted facets of one's ministry. It is under his leadership that my relevant foundation was laid and developed. I learned that "pastoring more than preaching, but a key thread connects preaching to every other major part of the job: bringing the Bible to bear on the messy details of people's hearts, minds, and lives. Pastoring is more than preaching, and preaching is more than dropping truth bombs from a shock-proof height."[2] I was blessed to get the "behind the scenes" look at ministry. It was my first time seeing the day-to-day operations of a church and ministry. From weekly staff meetings at the church to taking meetings with city leaders about finding and offering resources to those in the community who were in need. I learned that preaching and teaching, while important, were not the majority or totality of what ministry should

[1] Shana Schutte, "Two Truths about Your God-given Purpose," Focus on the Family, https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/two-truths-about-your-god-given-purpose/.

[2] Bobby Jamieson, "Pastoring Is More than Preaching," Desiring God, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/pastoring-is-more-than-preaching.

be. For me, it was a real glimpse at what Jesus shared was His mission on Earth. In Luke chapter 4:18-19 says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor; He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."[3]

The church took on that scripture as its mantra for the duration of my time there. For five years, I was able to work alongside Pastor Damian Epps, as he sought to like Jesus, reach those in society who were often overlooked and left out. I was shown and taught daily that the role of the pastor and preacher far extends not just beyond the walls of the church but beyond the parking lot, beyond the street, and even beyond the city the church was in. Pastor Epps shared with me candidly during a conversation that "Ministry without the desire for global impact is a ministry that is sleeping on the power and potential of doing ministry like Jesus." That quote and many others have been with me throughout my ministry.

After five years of faithful service in Iowa, God moved and I landed in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Much like in Iowa, I was allowed to serve alongside a great pastor, Shelton Charles Dixon who had a heart for ministry work. It was here that I not only saw the pastor doing the work at church but also in his home life. We developed a father-son relationship that is just as strong today as it was when I was with him. I grew as a minister and a man under his leadership. I finished my undergraduate degree and earned a Master of Divinity degree with his moral, spiritual, and financial support. He showed me how to conduct myself in the public square and not just demand respect but to be

[3] Biblical citations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise stated, Luke 4:18.

respectable; there is a difference. “People show respect because they have trust in your capabilities and your personal characteristics.”[4] He taught me that what matters most is your character, not your reputation. Reputation is what others think about you, while character is what God knows about you. Character will keep you in positions and circles that reputation can get you into but not sustain you. He was the founder of the church he pastored after being voted out for trying to move the church to a new location. He shared with me that that season of his life was difficult because he wanted to respond in a way that was not fitting of a pastor, but he had to remember that those he led were watching. Pastor Dixon knew if he responded negatively it would say to others that it is right for them to do so when they face life’s issues. His impact on my life has sustained me through some personal issues over the years and has made me careful with how I publicly and privately interact with others.

While in Baton Rouge, I was thrust into doing more denominational work as well, serving alongside the National President of the National Baptist Convention of America, Dr. Samuel C. Tolbert, Jr., of Lake Charles, Louisiana. It was under his leadership that I learned the value of partnership in ministry. He would always say to the convention at our national meetings, “I’m just the president. I can’t do this work alone.” He would allow me to sit in meetings and hear conversations discussing the next phase of many of his endeavors to better the convention to serve its member churches. I learned the value and importance of being true to your word and living what you preach. “We practice what we preach when we live our lives as reflections of the life of Christ. The way we act

[4] Alison Vidotto, “Respect – Command It, Don’t Demand It,” HerBusiness, https://herbusiness.com/blog/respect-command-dont-demand/#:~:text=There%20are%20those%20who%20will,%3B%20courtesy%2C%20obedience%2C%20deference.

at work should be the same way we act at home, at church, around other Christians, in the supermarket, or waiting for a bus."[5] Again, a leader that spoke to me and had a hand in molding me into a better man and minister.

Most of my life I had been exposed to bad examples of manhood and even ministry. Things that the average churchgoer and young man was not exposed to. So, I went through life looking for someone who could help guide me through the different stages of life. It was during my time in Baton Rouge that I believe I found those people. Unfortunately, it was later in life, and I had already developed habits and practices that were birthed during times when I needed someone to show me the way. I lacked the discipline I felt I needed but the foundation for it was being laid by the people I was serving with. I was making better, more informed choices in life and ministry. I was maturing due to the models I was exposed to. Those models were in positions and places I desired to be. I wanted to make them proud and be like them in a sense, at the same time. I wanted to make good on the investments they made in me and the trust they put in me to serve in the capacities they allowed. Those days fueled my drive and determination to finish and make the best decisions I could as a man and minister.

So, when it was time to move back home to care for my parents, I turned to those leaders for guidance with finding a new church home, a place to serve. "To become a member is to join arms with others of like faith and to join God in His redemptive work in this world."[6] Unfortunately, everywhere they "sent" me did not feel like home. I was

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[5] Neil Epler, "Practice What You Preach," Ministry Matters, https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1804/practice-what-you-preach.

[6] Paul Chappell, "Why Every Christian Needs a Church Home," Ministry127, https://ministry127.com/christian-living/why-every-christian-needs-a-church-home.

eager to serve as I did with them, and it seemed that the pastors I ran into only saw me as a musician. That is something that still bothers me to no end. While I am a musician, I do not like to feel limited to that. But as fate would have it, I ended up at the St. John Church to fill a void they had on their music staff. It was not until months after that I was approached by my current pastor's assistant and asked to come see him in his office. It was then that he informed me that other pastors in the city and various places he traveled asked him did he know me. He shared with me that he was unaware that I was a preacher and that he wanted to pour into that side of me and work alongside him. So, it started to feel like home again. It started to feel like what I had experienced in my previous churches. I was going to get to work with my pastor closely and grow as a minister.

Context

In working with Pastor Denny D. Davis, he shared with me not just the highlights of his tenure at the St. John Church but also his darkest moments as well. He shared with me the journey that took the St. John church to the heights of not just having but seeing more than 13,000 members every week. He shared with me the ministry model that he employed that undergirded the ministry and fueled its success. The church was having five services every weekend which at one point included a service at the Nokia Center in Grand Prairie, a venue primarily used to host concerts for national and global recording artists. In one of our lunch meetings, he discussed how and when things started to decline. One Sunday, while preparing to preach for him, he leaned over to me and started talking about how he remembered when they needed extra seats added to the sanctuary due to the number of people that entered. He expressed that he was earnestly praying to

see those types of Sundays again. He also discussed in detail how he envisioned his "exit" from Sunday-to-Sunday pastoral ministry. He expressed to me that his greatest fear is not leaving something for the next pastor to work with and that fear is fueled by the absence of the young adult population in the church and the absence of a solid discipleship model. He discussed how years ago the young adult population was so strong that he was in the process of securing a campus that would be dedicated to that demographic exclusively. He also shared that the church has a churchwide discipleship program for all ages. This program created momentum for growth in membership and the spirituality of the church.

After this vision collapsed, Davis says that he saw a sort of mass exodus in the membership of the congregation. Some were born members of the church who are still present and active but there is not the same robust and active population as he once had. Those who were once part of the ministerial staff have either gone on to start their ministry, become pastors of established churches, or have joined another ministry where they serve in different capacities. The absence of those faces and voices in leadership led to others in various age groups following them, finding a new church with younger leaders, or not physically attending the church anymore. While they still have some connection with Pastor Davis, who in most cases they still call their pastor, there is little to no connection with the church. People do not belong to churches the way they once did, even when they show up for religious services.[7]

On the surface, one would suggest that the mass exodus was due to a change in the age of the church's membership or some other factors, like emerging churches in the

[7] Amy Frykholm, "Loose Connections: What's Happening to Church Membership?" The Christian Century, https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-05/loose-connections.

area. However, after more dialogue with Pastor Davis and spending more time at the church, the underlying issue became obvious; the missing discipleship program. In my opinion, the absence of this type of program puts the future of the church in jeopardy. Discipleship should be the firm foundation of any church. It is the great commandment of the church to make disciples. Dr. Richard J. Krejcir argues "When a church forsakes discipleship, its people will not grow and thus will not reach out. Many will give up on Christianity while others become confused, calloused, or complacent."[8] Without discipleship, the church is not fulfilling the great commandment but to make disciples, one must first be a disciple. The sad truth and commentary of the church are d. Many began ministry at an early age and were thrust into positions without being discipled first. So, they have no reference or example for how it is supposed to look or be done.

I was taught that most times to find an answer to an issue you must first understand what the issue is not first. This is not an issue of giftedness, because most in ministry have clear and undeniable gifts and those gifts have made it possible for them to excel in ministry and reach heights that were never imagined. I have heard stories and met ministry leaders and pastors who tell of starting as children and putting in decades of work in the church and are major success stories. What I have not heard from most of them is how they were discipled. Who was it that guided them through life and ministry? What mistakes did they make that were later corrected by someone else? Who do they go to when they face tough circumstances in life? These and many other questions highlight a major issue in many churches, leaders have not been discipled. An undiscipled leader is

[8] Richard Krejcir, "The Importance of Discipleship and Growth," Church Leadership, http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42814.

an undisciplined leader. Those leaders will create issues within churches and ministries that will cause irreparable damage.

I believe throughout my life I have been given the tools to help aid those who are gifted to serve find their lane to serve while also finding the answers to those inner questions that may be causing them inner grief. As a child, I was forced to moments of isolation that led to developing a prayer life which serves now as the foundation of my life and ministry. As a child, I did not fully understand but I had always heard in church that if you had questions about life God was the one to ask and God would hear and answer prayer. This simple foundational teaching sustained me when I did not know I was being sustained. This foundation is what helped me to navigate the initial call to ministry. I was called to ministry while dealing with parental abandonment and homelessness. That was my natural situation, but it sheds light on my spiritual disposition at the time. I was without a pastor and a church home. I was just a musician going to the church to get paid and make ends meet. No real connection to a church or a family of faith. So how could I properly deal with spiritual matters without a spiritual space to find refuge?

This is the space that many in ministry deal with as well. While they may be in some ways connected to a church, they struggle to find a space to help with their daily spiritual formation. They do not have a place of refuge where they can address real-life issues and find spiritual solutions. While they can hear pastors on Sundays deliver messages, they do not have a relationship with them that allows direct access to their wisdom beyond their preaching. Many preach their sermons and struggle in the same area they preach about. I was allowed to do life alongside my leaders. My pastors were hands-

on in my development as a man, not just a minister. They were able to pour into me in ways that not many get an opportunity to experience. That is what I believe kept me from making some of the mistakes that I have seen others make and choosing routes that others do not know are available to them. Providing sound advice and even examples of how to make those daily choices was key to my development. Serving with them showed me the importance of not making all of life's choices alone. Their attention to me was well-contributed to my well-doing. I do not think I would be where I am without those connections. Some people have been in the same or similar situations as you find yourself in and it sometimes makes things easier when you can draw from those wells of wisdom. Their wisdom was also backed by a strong biblical foundation. I would sit and hear the same sermons and Bible study lessons as everyone else in the congregation, but they were taken a step further when I was able to sit and ask questions about the lessons and sermons that I heard. This next step beyond just hearing proved to be most valuable. Most sermons we hear make us feel better but very little time is spent on explaining how to apply what you heard to help you live better.

In my personal life, I would take notes on sermons and then go home and try to further study the scriptures and principles presented but I always struggled with the application of those scriptures and principles. I did not know how to make a life connection. It was not until I was able to sit with my pastors and listen to them explain how they arrived at those things in the sermon that I was able to take my study to that level of depth. It birthed a strong desire in me to provide that same type of sharing to those I was connected to. I love to explore biblical principles in ways that lead to application and growth. Especially considering that one can get online now and find so

much being offered with little to no explanation, I believe that space to dig into those principles with scriptural backing and sound doctrine is much needed.

The project centers around defining what discipleship for leaders is and what it looks like in the present day. It addresses the concept of how in a post-pandemic, social media age the church frames the idea of discipleship. The church of old had Sunday school and Baptist Training Union (BTU) that was used to broaden the teaching and application of the principles heard in sermons. But was that discipleship? I believe that discipleship goes beyond teaching the Bible rather how was it taught in the Bible should be applied to the life of the Bible-believing Christian. I explored this idea in depth through literature and research and used those findings to build a program, class, or ministry that brings these ideas and concepts together. While the project centers around helping those seeking discipleship, it would also help me to wrestle with some of the questions I have about discipleship. I believe that discipleship is doing life with people. Working through mistakes and misunderstandings, living through seasons of loss and grief, navigating the different life stages, learning how to lead a family, and raising children are a few vital components of a well-rounded disciple.

Beyond the surface of what it is, I hope to learn the importance of early and intentional discipleship. I cannot help but think of how my life would have looked had I been disciplined early when my gifts were identified. Some people said they saw things in me that I did not see myself, but they never did anything to help cultivate those gifts or show me how to carry those gifts. They then used me and my gifts to enhance their ministries but failed to equip me to handle my personal life. Some mistakes and missteps could have been avoided if I had a voice of reason and correction leading me. I think that

is also a thread within the concept of discipleship. Gift shaping and grooming is something that I also believe is missing in the church now and I would incorporate that into the project as well. By shaping and grooming, I mean not just putting someone in a position but properly training them and giving them opportunities to develop before being asked to perform. It makes me think how many people sit in churches week in and week out with a burning desire that they cannot explain and then leave with that desire still burning. This leads to people trying things that lead to spiritual confusion and frustration. They hear the voice of God but do not know what to do with what they hear. When Jesus called the disciples, He told them to follow Him and then proceeded to guide their following by living before them what he wanted them to learn, know, and do. Jesus led by example and with explanation. I cannot help but think about how many have heard that call to follow but cannot decipher the path they are supposed to be following.

The project covers not just lay persons, but also those in ministry. We are taught how to put sermons and lessons together while neglecting to stress the importance of applying the sermon to ourselves. There are many stories I have heard of preachers who share that they stand and deliver a message on a topic that they were personally struggling with. Telling congregants what to do and how to get out of situations that they could not get themselves out of. It creates a mental complex that could lead to depression. I also experienced this in my personal life. It was not until I was able to have a conversation and build a relationship with a pastor who had experienced the same thing that I was able to find the strength and courage to address my issues head-on and not allow them to bleed into my messages and lessons. I believe the research needed to build this project will help me tremendously with being able to articulate the ideas in my head

regarding discipleship. I have so many questions that I think pointed study and application will help to answer that will in turn help those who take part in the implementation and help within my context to address the issue of absence and declining membership. Most people join church looking to fill a void that they believe only God and the church can fill. A void that goes beyond salvation and leads to sanctification, which I believe is also a thread within the concept of discipleship.

In preliminary reading and study, I found that most sources I engaged with agree on a general working definition of discipleship using the life of Jesus and Matthew 28:18-20 as the foundation. The definition addresses the areas of thought that I initially had when comparing my ministry journey and the needs of my current context. Navigators.org offers this widely accepted definition within their study on discipleship. They suggest that "a disciple is someone who believes in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, intentionally learns from Him, and strives to live more like Him. Discipleship is a widely used word to describe a journey of spiritual growth. This growth happens as a person comes alongside another to witness to them, pray with them, study the Bible with them, and fellowship with them."[9] I seek to take this working definition and expound on the ideas expressed in it and then build courses that explain their meaning and offer practical means to apply those principles to one's daily life.

In evaluating church leaders, a biblical example of how to navigate life's ever-changing seasons and develop personal discipleship leads me to the life of Joseph in the Book of Genesis (Gen. 37-50). Joseph's life is filled with moments of disappointment

[9] Marvin Campbell, "The Basics of Discipleship," The Navigators, https://www.navigators.org/resource/basics-of-discipleship/#:~:text=Definition%20of%20Discipleship,What%20is%20Discipleship%3F,a%20journey%20of%20spiritual%20growth.

and danger, yet he exhibits a level of discipline that church leaders should adopt. Joseph demonstrates that focusing on gifts and purpose, coupled with discipline, results in a life that not only achieves personal success but also impacts and aids those who encounter him. Ministry leaders bear the responsibility for the spiritual and, in some cases, natural growth of those who submit to their leadership. While many leaders effectively present examples, many struggle to be genuine examples themselves. The unfortunate reality is that many leaders attempt to make disciples without having first been discipled themselves; thus, there exists the potential for disciple-less churches and ministries.

When I reflect on my life experiences and current context, there is a need for leaders to be equipped with the tools to navigate life in a way that shows others the way. These tools are not only biblical, but in most cases, can also be found in other areas of academia and study. Some psychological tools and practices would greatly aid in shaping how a person thinks about themselves and their place in the world. Tools that help shape how we interact with others and process those interactions. Unfortunately, many individuals are thrust into leadership positions without knowing the expectations that come with those roles. A leader often becomes the first point of contact when dealing with various issues, and if the leader is not equipped to support them properly, it creates an unhealthy environment. Unhealthy practices lead to unhealthy leaders, members, and churches, which in turn leads to unhealthy relationships in communities, causing families to struggle and fall apart. When families fall apart, communities decline.

Healthy leaders create and cultivate a culture of health that becomes contagious to the entire congregation. They do so by having a clear and communicated vision, they empower and trust others to perform at their highest potential. Most importantly, they

lead by example. Leaders must model the behaviors and values they expect to see from and in their followers. This will cause those impacted by their leadership to inspire and encourage others to follow suit. Those behaviors come through time and intentional discipleship. It is important to pour into others from the well that has been poured into them at different stages of their life. They view the growth of others as a ministry. So "Rather than using people to grow ministry, healthy leaders use ministry to grow people. That shift in practice and perspective makes all the difference."[10] When a leader shifts their perspective of those they lead, it will cause them to shift how they view their personal discipleship. In essence, they are developing healthier habits for themselves for the sake of others.

While grief and life issues are an inevitable part of life, being equipped to navigate those seasons of life is a choice. A choice that a leader must make for themselves. It becomes part of the discipline of that leader to make the choice daily to do what is right and what is beneficial for themselves and the ones they lead. This choice may require the leader to seek help outside the church from those who have dedicated their lives to serving those in need. For far too long, church leaders have lived with the erroneous idea that seeking this type of assistance meant they were not qualified to lead. I believe that the ability and courage to admit the need for, seek, and follow advice from an outside source is the mark of a great leader. "Good leadership is about connection, which is based on trust. Your team must see you as a fallible person who sometimes needs help,

[10] Andrea Lanthrop, "Becoming Healthy Leaders," Influence2, https://influencemagazine.com/en/Practice/Becoming-Healthy-Leaders.

just like everyone else."[11] Transparency and vulnerability can be helpful tools for effective leadership, but only when what is shared has positive value for the listener. Sharing struggles without practical application can damage the leader's image and trust level.

This is where my life and current context collide. My life has taught me the importance of personal discipleship, and my context needs leaders who have been equipped in this area. Personal discipleship is an ongoing process of spiritual growth that aligns with Jesus' teachings and leads to transformation. It requires the person to take responsibility for their relationship with God and understand their place in the Christian faith. The role requires one to acknowledge their gifts and activate those gifts for use in the kingdom of God. "You have a significant role in the kingdom of God. Your calling is to put God's gifts to you to work in the world so that they multiply and bring his rule and reign into every part of YOUR life, and through you, the world around you."[12] The emphasis in this last phrase lies in the personal pronouns used. Leaders must be self-aware and pay close attention to their gifts and how they are using them.

The need for leaders to have the ability to properly lead and steward their gifts during times of personal grief and circumstances is crucial for the life of the church. If the leader is ill-equipped to navigate seasons of grief, they will not be able to aid those they are charged to lead navigate seasons of grief. This project aims to introduce and

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[11] Anne Evenson, "Subscribe," It's Your Career, https://itsyourcareer.blog/strong-managers-and-leaders-arent-afraid-to-ask-for-help/#:~:text=Good%20leadership%20is%20about%20connection,to%20building%20strong%20workplace%20relationships.

[12] Rachel Starr Thompson, "Your Kingdom Calling: Discover Your Place in the Kingdom of God," Rachel Starr Thomson - Fiction and Theology for Readers of Faith, https://rachelstarrthomson.com/enroll-your-kingdom-calling/#:~:text=YOU%20have%20a%20significant%20role,you%2C%20the%20world%20around%20you.

encourage leaders in my context to develop the tools necessary to navigate seasons of grief more effectively, ultimately enabling them to support those they lead in navigating similar situations. While grief can be an overwhelming emotion, there are ways for leaders to manage those emotions as they attempt to lead others. They must be able to recognize and acknowledge their emotions while navigating seasons of grief. While self-care is important, leaders must also recognize the value of seeking support and outside help. It is oxymoronic for a leader to deny their own need for help while offering themselves as a source of help to others. Seeking outside help can prevent the leader from engaging in practices that cause more harm to themselves in the process. The ability to communicate one's needs is crucial in preventing misunderstandings and inadvertently mistreating others.

This project will promote healthy habits among leaders. The leader will then be equipped to lead from a healthy perspective and produce healthy followers. This, in turn, will foster a healthy ministry and cultivate a thriving church that contributes to the community's well-being. If the purpose of the church is to serve the community, it needs to have the necessary tools to do so, and those tools begin with the leaders of the church. Much like having a physical body, it starts with the discipline of diet and exercise. The same holds true for spiritual discipline; it matters most what you consume because it informs what you put out. If you learn and practice bad habits, you will not receive a positive outcome. Then, you will share those bad habits with others. The effort needed to fix what has been damaged will be wasted by trying to fix bad habits with equally bad or worse habits. "Certain behaviors become deeply ingrained, especially if you have repeated them for years. However, it is still possible to break bad habits, curb addictions,

and replace negative behaviors. The process will require both patience and persistence, but you can change your life for the better."[13] Learning new, healthy habits will be vital in restoring and reviving declining ministries within the church. This will not be a quick fix, but it will hopefully birth a new lifestyle in the leader that will become contagious to the followers. In hopes of reviving and cultivating a discipleship culture in the church could be the determining factor for the trajectory of the next generation of the church.

[13] Sheldon Reid, "How to Break Bad Habits and Change Negative Behaviors," Help Guide, https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/wellbeing/how-to-break-bad-habits-and-change-negative-behaviors.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The focused scriptural text chosen to identify, address, and responding to the impact of being gifted and mishandled by those who benefit from said gift is Genesis 50:19,20. These two verses of scripture constitute the culmination of the life journey of Joseph, who was gifted by God with the ability to interpret dreams. The entire narrative of Joseph, which begins in Genesis chapter thirty-seven, provides an account of Joseph's life from the age of seventeen. The narrative of his life opens in verse three, which states, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors" (Gen. 37:3). The following verse foreshadows the consequences associated with the sentiments of the father expressed in the previous verse. Verse four says, "But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him" (Gen. 37:4). This juxtaposition of love of the father and hate from his brothers will set the tenor and tone for the duration of the narrative of his life. It also serves as a parallel to the relationship of God and the gifted verses and the people of God. He will be loved for who he is and hated for the same reason. Such is the case for many who serve in leadership capacities in many churches, loved by some and hated by others for the same reason. The oxymoronic nature of this duality in ministerial life can directly impact not just how one

lives life, but also how one operates in a leadership role that requires the exposure and exercise of those gifts.

Introduction

The Book of Genesis is the very first book of the Bible and serves as the foundation for the entire biblical narrative. The book's contents shed light on the origins of the universe, human existence, and the relationship between God and humanity. The book is widely accepted and referred to as the Book of Beginnings. Not only does the name Genesis itself mean "origin" or "beginning," but "In the Hebrew canon, the book bears the title *be^{e}rē›šîṯ* "in the beginning," from its opening words."[1] Placing the book canonical as the opening book is not merely arbitrary. Serving as the foundation upon which the rest of the biblical narrative is built, a more in-depth study and understanding of the contents of Genesis reveals its essential role in establishing theological, historical, and cultural roots. "The historical account in Genesis is attacked vehemently because those who oppose Christianity know it is the foundation of all doctrine."[2]

Theologically, the book sets the framework for the entire Bible. It contains the origin story of Earth and the universe, including human creation and the establishment of the covenant between God and man. Theological concepts of God's sovereignty, human responsibility, and the consequences of disobedience are introduced. The book also introduces significant theological themes, including sin, redemption, and promises. These and other biblical concepts find their fulfillment in the subsequent books of the Bible.

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[1] Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 408.

[2] Ken Ham, "Genesis-the Foundation of Christianity," Answers In Genesis, https://answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2016/12/29/genesis-foundation-of-christianity/.

John Anderson, contributor to the Lexham Bible Dictionary argues the book's importance by stating that, "It is foundational and necessary for understanding the larger biblical canon, both Old and New Testaments."[3] Anderson is suggesting that without the foundation and framework laid in Genesis, it would be difficult and, in some instances, impossible to properly interpret the rest of the Bible.

While Genesis lays the foundation it also provides a glimpse into scenes and shifts of ancient history, sharing stories of the origins of the world and of all cultures, providing valuable insights into the origins of nations, languages, and cultures. Biblical scholars and historians have found it very challenging to verify the historical accuracy of every detail, but many agree that there is enough solid evidence to accept Genesis as more than just a religious tale but as actual world history. The book is generally broken into two parts with two themes. Pastor and author, Cole Newton suggests, "The overarching theme of Genesis 1-11 is to introduce humanity to the one true God through the lens of four events that shaped all of human existence: the creation of the world, the fall of humanity, the great flood, and the scattering at Babel."[4] Newton later says that the theme of the remaining chapters of the book are written "to introduce humanity to the one true God who faithfully and graciously makes and maintains covenants with His chosen people."[5] Though riddled with several scenes and stories those two themes ring true throughout the Bible.

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[3] John E. Anderson, "Book of Genesis," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

[4] Cole Newton, "B.C. Newton: Rooter Theology for the Unwithered Church," B. C. Newton, https://bcnewton.co/2023/03/13/background-on-genesis/.

[5] Cole Newton, "B.C. Newton: Rooter Theology for the Unwithered Church," B. C. Newton, https://bcnewton.co/2023/03/13/background-on-genesis/.

The Book of Genesis, beyond its historical and theological implications, serves as a rich source of allegorical meanings and moral lessons. The book can be, and in most instances is interpreted symbolically, as to find deeper meaning and spiritual truths woven into the narratives presented. Ideas and concepts such as the importance of stewardship of creation, the inner workings of family and interpersonal relationships, mankind's addiction to power and the consequences of disobedience to God's commands in the story of Noah. This is done in how the book is literally written. The structure of the individual narratives and genealogies present a distinctive literary structure that then makes it possible for multiple stories or narratives to be intertwined by way of theme. Such as the themes of creation, relationships, both human and divine, and God's presence and participation in the world.

Authorship

The literary structure of the book lends itself to many schools of thought concerning its authorship. While the question of authorship is still a major subject of debate and speculation, there are two views that are more prominent and accepted. One school of thought is known as the Documentary Hypothesis, also known as JEDP, that is to suggest that the book was a collective work, not just the work of one individual. This idea was made popular in in the nineteenth century by German biblical scholars. They argue that the book is a compilation of several sources and documents. Many who argue for this stance would present the cohesive and coherent nature of the book is too fluid to be the work of one mind. Some believe that it is so cohesive that the book came together by accident. Everett Fox states in his book *Can Genesis be Read as a Book*, "Even

leaving aside the question of sources, one observes that some critics treat the text as almost an accident of editing, whose importance lies mostly in its overall role in the Pentateuch."[6] That is to suggest that its role in the Pentateuch is more than knowing who penned it. Mainly that its relevance and role far outweigh the debate concerning its authorship. Fox goes on to quote Rabbi Samuel Sandmel, author and former professor of Bible and Hellenistic literature at Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion who said, "Genesis exists as a separate book because it contains sufficient material for a scroll, rather than because it was planned as a unit. The division was strictly a matter of convenience."[7]

The Documentary Hypothesis proposes that the book is comprised of four distinct sources. Scholars designated the sources as J, E, P, and D, each highlighting a different name used for or characterization of God. J being the source that refers to passages that use the name Yahweh. E represents passages when the name Elohim was used. P stands for priestly passages that mainly focus on religious, cultic and priestly matters. D passages are those that introduce and define laws and ethical codes. These four sources are believed to have later been combined to produce the book as whole, through careful editing and revisions.[8] Those who argue for this hypothesis point out the linguistic, stylistic, and thematic nuances of various sections of the book indicate multiple authorship.

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[6] Everett Fox, "Can Genesis Be Read as a Book," The Westminister Standards, http://thewestminsterstandards.com/wcf-chapter-3-of-gods-eternal-decree-ch3-1-ch3-3/.

[7] Everett Fox, "Can Genesis Be Read as a Book," The Westminister Standards, http://thewestminsterstandards.com/wcf-chapter-3-of-gods-eternal-decree-ch3-1-ch3-3/.

[8] Henry E. Neufeld, "JEDP Source Theory," Academic Kellogg, https://academic.kellogg.edu/marklinl/Bible/Readings/DocumentaryHypothesis.htm.

Regarding criticism, there are those who subscribe to the more traditional view as it relates to the author of Genesis. These scholars and theologians contend that the central figure of the Exodus narrative, Moses is the author of Genesis. Many hang their belief on a few biblical passages, such as Exodus 17:14 which states, "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a remembrance in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua." This passage is believed to be God instructing Moses to write events in a book, thus causing theologians to suggest that this was common practice for Moses to write down events and the collection of those writings constitutes the makeup of the book of Genesis and the four other books that make up the Torah. Along with scriptural backing and foundation, scholars argue that Moses was educated in the court of Pharoah and had the skills to write; Moses as the author would add credibility by connecting the book's content to Israelite history. Allen Ross argues, "And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), his literary skills would have enabled him to collect Israel's traditions and records and to compose the work. His communion with God at Horeb and throughout his life would have given him direction for this task. Genesis provided the theological and historical foundation for the Exodus and the covenant at Sinai."[9]

Context of Focus Text

The story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis is a detailed narrative that introduces valuable and vital life lessons. It shares the intricate journey of a young, gifted man who faces immense adversity early in life and, despite being mishandled and, in a sense,

[9] Allen P. Ross, "Genesis," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 16-27.

assaulted by those whom he trusted, emerges triumphant displaying unwavering integrity, patience, and forgiveness. The Joseph narrative serves as an example and template to the reader who, in the face of adversity, should remain steadfast, trusting that divine destiny will unfold as divinely intended. That steadfast determination and display of integrity ultimately led Joseph to going from being the victim of interpersonal persecution to rising to a position of power and prominence in ancient Egypt. The story not only captures the attention of the reader, but it arrests the intellect and causes one to examine the inventory of their own life's adversity and properly assess past reactions and adjust future responses to adverse occurrences.

Author and theologian John Butler contends that there are a few reasons why so much of the story of Joseph is written in the Bible. His three reasons are that Joseph's story highlights for the reader the explanation of circumstances, example of conduct, and the exhibit of Christ. He argues that without Joseph's story "we would be greatly puzzled about the circumstances described in the book of Exodus."[10] He explains that we would not understand the verbiage in passages like Exodus 1:8 when the text reads that a king arose that did not know Joseph and how that would impact how Israel's "stay" in Egypt would transpire.

First, he argues for Joseph's exemplary life. As an example of conduct Butler says of Joseph that "his life is nearly impeccable, and, as a result, gives valuable instruction and encouragement in the matter of God-honoring behavior. Joseph had such a varied life yet in every situation he shows us how to live uprightly and faithfully for God."[11] Joseph

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[10] John G. Butler, *Joseph: The Patriarch of Character* (Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth Book Company, 1993), 10.

[11] Butler, *Joseph: The Patriarch of Character*, 11.

stands out as one in scripture who exhibits an excellent example of how men and women should conduct themselves when facing life's trials and tribulations. An example of how you cannot always control circumstances, but you can make the determination to not let circumstances control you. Butler's final reason is that Joseph's life is an exhibit of Christ in that "Joseph is in many ways an excellent type of Christ, and this alone merits much being written about his life."[12] Butler says, "Christ is the main theme of the Scriptures, and Joseph's story certainly emphasizes this blessed and illuminating truth."[13]

Lessons from Joseph's Life

Joseph is the eleventh son of Jacob, and the Bible picks up his story in depth at the age of seventeen. The recurring sequence of Joseph trusting the fruits of his gift with those he trusts, and his trusting brothers became filled with ill feelings about his gift. As a result, Joseph finds himself in life-threatening and life-altering circumstances due to the gift, a coat of many colors, gifted by his father. This gift marked him as his father's beloved or, some suggest, the favorite son. Genesis 37:3 says, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors." This robe or coat signified rank and was traditionally given to the firstborn. Some scholars suggest that Joseph was given this coat because he exhibited character early in life that his brothers failed to show or even possess, while others take the literal words from verse three as the reason, he was given the coat, he was a child of Jacob's old age. Whether it was due to character or endearment, the coat ignited jealousy

[12] Butler, *Joseph: The Patriarch of Character*, 11.

[13] Butler, *Joseph: The Patriarch of Character*, 11.

and envy from his brothers. “That coat announced his father’s favoritism, and would ironically be a torrid symbol of Jacob’s pain when the brothers return it stained in blood.”[14] This introduces the concept of parental partiality to Joseph’s story, which suggests that his parent loves or prefers him over his brothers. That partiality sets Joseph up to be hated and envied by those who were supposed to be his inner circle and source of love and nurture.

In his naivety, Joseph shares a dream with his brothers, who now are envious of his father’s favoritism, his coat, and one day rulership over them which leads to his brothers conspiring to kill him. Instead of killing Joseph, they decide to sell him into slavery which is the start of a series of unfortunate happenings that eventually landed Joseph in Egypt and the dream he shares with them becomes reality. It is here that Joseph is not only exposed due to his earthly father gifting him a coat, but he exposes that God had gifted him the ability to interpret dreams. So not only do the brothers feel a sense of inferiority due to what their father gave their younger brother but now they see that he can do something that none of them could do. He had what they did not, and they could not understand why. They only way they feel they can deal with Joseph is to not deal with him at all.

When sold into slavery, Joseph finds himself in Egypt, where his story takes another unexpected turn. He is sold to Potiphar, a high-ranking Egyptian official, who recognizes Joseph's exceptional capabilities. As Joseph continues to steward the gift of dream interpretation he is promoted to the position of overseer of Potiphar’s household. Joseph's hard work, dedication, and integrity are admired by Potiphar, but he finds

[14] Brady Cook, “Why Did Jacob Make Joseph A Coat of Many Colors? (Genesis 37:3),” Coffee and a Bible, https://www.coffeeandabible.com/coat-of-many-colors/.

himself again in unfortunate circumstances when Potiphar's wife falsely accuses him of assault after he refuses to acquiesce to her sexual proposal. Joseph's response to Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:9 says, "He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

As a result of this false accusation, Joseph is thrown in prison. In prison, Joseph's gift of interpreting dreams is spread around the prison and catches the ear of the Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and baker, who both experience dreams they cannot interpret. Joseph accurately interprets their dreams, dreams foretelling the cupbearer's release and the baker's execution. However, upon the cupbearer's release, he soon forgets the promise he made to Joseph that he would advocate for his freedom. After a couple years in prison, Joseph finds himself yet again in a position to use his gift in unexpected and unusual circumstances. When Pharaoh has troubling dreams, he is made aware of Joseph's exceptional gift and summons him to be brought to him to interpret the meaning of his dreams. Joseph deciphers the dreams, which foretell of an impending famine followed by seven years of abundance. Pharaoh, then impressed by the wisdom of Joseph, appoints him second-in-command over all of Egypt. This position places Joseph in a space of authority and great responsibility. It is in this position he saw the dream he first shared with his father and brothers in Genesis chapter thirty-seven come to pass.

The narrative of the life of Joseph highlights many necessary and notable lessons that should be paramount to those who are gifted, those who suffer abuse due to being gifted, and those exalted to positions of power because of the same gift. The narrative emphasizes the importance of integrity. In the face of challenges and temptations, Joseph

consistently remains true to and exercises his values and makes his decision based on the direction of his moral compass. This steadfastness to integral living and decision-making is what ultimately positions him for his elevation.

The narrative also underscores the virtue of patience. Joseph is betrayed by his brothers, spends years in slavery and imprisonment before the reality of his dreams begin to materialize. He shows that the key to maintaining faith and trust in God is remaining patient and resilient even when your circumstances diametrically oppose what God told or showed you. Patience allows him to persevere through the trials he faces, and eventually position him for elevation and fulfillment of purpose.

The narrative also highlights the necessity and power of forgiveness. When Joseph's brothers, who had once betrayed him and sold him to slavery, come to Egypt seeking provision during the famine, Joseph is in a position to do to them what many would say they deserved. He could seek and exact revenge. Instead, he decides to forgive and exhibit empathy, acknowledging that what happened to him was all part of God's plan. By forgiving his brothers, Joseph can reconcile with them and restore fellowship with his family.

Focus Text

After being betrayed, sold into slavery, imprisoned, and falsely accused of sexual harassment, Joseph finds himself in the palace of Pharaoh serving as second-in-command, and when his brothers come to him seeking provision in the famine, Joseph says: “But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you,

you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gn. 50:20).

Kenneth Matthew writes, "Joseph's response crystallizes the theology of the Joseph narrative as a whole."[15] It is the theology of the narrative that persuades many to ascribe to the idea that Joseph serves as a type of Christ. Greg Stiekes explains this in his article, "Seeing Jesus as a Type of Christ" in response to questions concerning Joseph in theological circles. Steikes says:

> I will answer Layton's question in the affirmative. The fact that Joseph remains "sinless" in the narrative (though we are theologically aware that all sin, Rom 3:10) is one of many points of contact between the lives of Joseph and Jesus, too numerous to fully enumerate here. For example, like Joseph, Jesus was the beloved Son of the Father (Matt 3:17; cf Gen 37:3)who was rejected by his own people, and by his brothers explicitly (John 1:11, 7:5, 15:24; cf Gen 37:4-5)Jesus left his exalted status to become a slave (Phil 2:7), after which he was wrongfully accused and delivered over to death. Yet, out of that death Jesus broke free in his resurrection in order to become the Savior of his people (Matt 1:21). In a strikingly similar way, Joseph became a slave because of the sin of his brothers (Gen 37:25-28, 36) and was later wrongly accused and left for dead in Pharaoh's prison (Gen 39:19-20). Yet God showed special favor to Joseph in that lowly place (Gen 39:21; cf Ps 16:10) and brought him out of prison, exalting him to a position of absolute authority (Gen 41:37-44) for the purpose of saving his people from certain death (Gen 50:20).[16]

He opens verse nineteen by reassuring his brothers by telling them do not be afraid. The King James version reads, "Fear not:" This word fear is used over three hundred times throughout the biblical canon and in all translations, it means to not be afraid. Joseph's brothers showed up and when they recognized Joseph, they no doubt thought back to the harm they had caused him and were afraid he would take out assumed

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[15] Kenneth Matthews, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005), 927.

[16] Greg Stiekes, *Seeing Joseph as a Type of Christ,* BJU Seminary, https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/seeing-joseph-as-a-type-of-christ/.

frustrations on them. Instead, Joseph forgives and comforts them by saying do not be afraid. They assumed he would do evil for evil, but instead, he responds to the evil done to him with empathy. He had already forgiven them in chapter forty-five after the death of his father, but their approach to him suggests they did not believe his initial forgiveness was genuine. When Joseph heard that they did not fully accept his forgiveness, he wept.

Dr. Gary Baker adds his commentary on this verse. Baker states, "Joseph did this because it deeply hurt him to think that his brothers didn't think his forgiveness was genuine (Gn. 50:16-18). Joseph reassured them of his love and forgiveness, and they were not to be afraid that he would do anything to hurt or harm them."[17]Although Joseph does not use the word forgiveness, his words express that he is not harboring ill feelings towards them because of their previous actions. This is paralleled to what takes place when God, through the sacrifice of Jesus, forgives us of our sins. God does not hold them against us, so we do not have to fear the assumed wrath associated with our transgressions against God. Joseph's "fear not" was not only laced with forgiveness but it was also dripped with grace. John Butler says:

> Joseph had freely forgiven his felons of their foulness; but they, like many in every age, seemed unable to believe or accept the greatness of grace. They felt they were such bad men that surely Joseph would sooner or later get even with them. But Joseph had forgiven them in grace, and grace is sufficient to keep the repenter from retribution.[18]

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[17] Gary Baker, "Joseph's Loving Forgiveness of His Brothers," The Paso Robles Press, https://pasoroblespress.com/commentary/josephs-loving-forgiveness-of-his-brothers-by-dr-gary-m-barker/#:~:text=Joseph%20did%20this%20because%20it,to%20hurt%20or%20harm%20them.

[18] John G. Butler, *Joseph: The Patriarch of Character* (Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth Book Company 1993), 183.

After extending grace and forgiveness Joseph asks them a rhetorical question. He asks, "Am I in the place of God?" (Gn. 50:19). Joseph asks the question to acknowledge his human limitations and God's ultimate control of everything taking place, not just in his life but in the life of his brothers as well. He also infers that he recognizes that only God is capable and has the authority to issue judgment and punishment. The word God here is the commonly used word Elohim. Same word found in Genesis chapter one when the Bible reads in the English Standard Version, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gn. 1:1). This commonly used name for God indicates the God who is the supreme being and creator of the universe. The usage here highlights that Joseph is informing his brothers that he is not in control of what happens to him nor to them. This is the same question Joseph's father; Jacob asks his wife Rachel in Genesis chapter thirty when she goes to him frustrated because she has not birthed any children. In anger Jacob responds, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Gn. 30:2). The question recognizes and relinquishes control of the situation and places it in the hands of God. In essence, Joseph is saying to his brothers that there was really nothing he could do to or for them or himself aside from what God has predetermined to take place.

The two phrases, when placed together in this verse, denote Joseph's awareness and relationship of his perspective and position. His perspective is shaped by his position. How he sees himself is determined by his view of God. For those who are gifted and lead, this is paramount in leading properly. One cannot and should not have an exalted view of themselves because that leads to diminished view of God's role in their lives. Ilan Olivares shares his view of perspective by saying, "If we're not careful, our perspectives

could end up being driven by what we've experienced, but not necessarily by what is true. But a God perspective works differently, a God perspective doesn't look at what you might be, it doesn't look at what you might have lost, but it looks at what you have now!"[19] He goes on to argue that as humans we have flawed perspectives because we have a wrong working definition of the word perspective. He says, "The origin of the word perspective comes from a Latin word, perspicere, which means to 'look through or beyond'. Our human perspective can only 'look at', 'look at all I've done wrong' 'look at all I've messed up' but a God perspective actually looks through or beyond our human perspectives."[20] Joseph's words to his brothers in verse nineteen are an example of looking beyond. Beyond what they did, beyond what happened to him, beyond even current circumstances. And the "beyond" that Joseph focus is fixed on is found in the next verse.

What Joseph offers here is what literary scholars call a contrary-to-fact supposition. This literary term denotes that what is assumed is not capable of fulfilment in the present or future and therefore not real. His brothers came up with scenarios in their minds not based on anything Joseph had done, much like when they were angry because they felt he was trying to boast about his gift of dream interpretation by sharing the dreams he had. They also based their assumptions on their own mentality. They believed he would do evil to them due to the evil they had done to him. Roderick Chisholm calls it contrary to fact conditional. He suggests that when presented with or

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[19] Ilan Olivares, "How to Have a God Perspective," Abundant Living Faith Center, https://www.alfc.com/2015/03/how-to-have-a-god-perspective/#:~:text=But%20a%20God%20perspective%20works,"look%20through%20or%20beyond.

[20] Ilan Olivares, "How to Have a God Perspective," Abundant Living Faith Center, https://www.alfc.com/2015/03/how-to-have-a-god-perspective/#:~:text=But%20a%20God%20perspective%20works,"look%20through%20or%20beyond.

when we are the presenter of this type of statement, "we seem to have knowledge of what might have happened, of what tendencies, faculties, or potentialities an object could manifest in suitable environments."[21] He says, "most of us would be inclined to say, is valid and significant, even though the possible events to which it seems to pertain may never become actual."[22] The brothers approached Joseph with contrary-to-fact conditional thoughts, and he responded with a contrary-to-fact supposition. That is to say, they believed it would turn out one way, but Joseph reassured them that it could not turn out the way they or even he could determine. Verse twenty says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gn. 50:20).

In *A Handbook on Genesis,* authors William Reyburn and Euan Fry restate this verse in several ways. "God took what you did wrong and made the end of it good." Some other renderings of the first part of the verse are "You made a plan to harm me, but God overturned your plan and made the fruit of it good" and "You wanted to hurt me, but God turned your plan around and used it in a good way."[23]

Joseph here informs his brothers that he knows the actions against him were of ill intent but prefaces it with an idiom. It is the same phrase used in Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil." Even though it is most often translated as "yes though," it is an acceptance of circumstances. Joseph is expressing that he, at some point, has matured spiritually to properly assess the unfortunate

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[21] Roderick M. Chisholm, "The Contrary to Fact Conditional," *Mind* (1946): 289-307.

[22] Chisholm, "The Contrary to Fact Conditional," 289-307.

[23] William David Reyburn, Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis, UBS Handbook Series* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1998), 1115.

circumstances he had to endure because of his brother's actions toward him. This suggests that one must accept the reality of their current situation and what they are facing and identify the cause of their challenges to make a proper assessment of the role these challenges play in their overall life plan. Joseph was aware of the purpose of his suffering. He says, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gn. 50:20).

This passage addresses the issues of theodicy. That is the justification of God's goodness and providence, given the existence of evil. The statement Joseph makes here summarizes what is at play in one's life when God allows something, God deliberately causes something, and God does not do anything in response to human needs. Even when humans are successful in harming one another, those efforts are still used by God to bring about good in the life of the victim and ultimately cause God's plan to be fulfilled. This idea is taken up again in Romans 8:28, where the Apostle Paul says, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Both phrases are examples of the literary device known as a chiasmus. That is, the two clauses of the verse balance against each other by reversing the structure of the words used. The juxtaposition of evil and good, as well as you and God, is what creates the balance. You meant evil, but God meant good using the same actions. The idea that God uses even the evil acts of men to accomplish God's good purposes is known as the doctrine of concurrence. Chapter three of the Westminster Confession of Faith defines it as "God from all eternity, did, by the wisest and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the

author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."[24]

Theologically, it addresses the idea of divine providence. Earl Radmacher says, "God works His good plan even through the evil plans of evil people. Even the worst events can be used in the hand of kindly Providence for His good."[25] Joseph's words do not exclude the presence of human freedom and responsibility. Still, they lean more on the fact that he believed all actions by humans, good or bad, were ultimately determined and designed by God to bring about God's purpose. Gordon Wenham calls this relationship between human activity and divine providence "a theological mystery."[26] He argues that providence is "ultimately beyond human comprehension."[27]

Joseph Exell echoes this mystery by saying, "This is, in fact, the great miracle of Providence, that no miracles are needed to accomplish its purposes."[28] On the subject of divine providence Von Rad says, "This rule of God for the salvation of men continuously permeates all realms of life and includes even man's evil by making the plans of the human heart serve divine purposes, without hindering them or excusing them."[29] Joseph was able to say this because throughout the trials of life he had a resolve that God was present with him, denoted by the refrain "the Lord was with him" which was repeated

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[24] Westminster Assembly, "God's Eternal Decree," West Minister Standard, http://thewestminsterstandards.com/wcf-chapter-3-of-gods-eternal-decree-ch3-1-ch3-3/.

[25] Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 83-84.

[26] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 112.

[27] Wenham, *Genesis 16-50,* 112.

[28] Joseph Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Genesis,* vol. 2 (London, UK: James Nesbet and Company, n.d.), 596.

[29] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philedelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1972).

throughout the narrative. So much so that even those who were in his presence had to proclaim that God was with him.

Again, Joseph backs up his rationale with revelatory reasoning; he follows the opening phrase of verse twenty with the reason why God uses the bad for good, "in order to preserve numerous people, as he is doing today." The English Standard Version renders it "to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gn. 50:20). Contextually, and some scholars argue literally, Joseph is simply referring to the fact that he was placed in the position he was in so that he could provide necessary resources to those who are living in Egypt through the dream interpreted and now realized seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. He is second in command, so he was placed in charge of issuing resources. A man of integrity and high character like Joseph in this position would mean that those in need would not be made to feel that they could not obtain the needs they were in dire need of, and in Joseph's case, even those like his brothers who had done evil to him. He was charged with the task of creating, developing, and implementing a plan for distributing goods. Joseph has consistently demonstrated throughout his life that he can be trusted by God and man to do the right thing when presented with the opportunity to do otherwise. Joseph informs his brothers that God used everything that happened to him to put him in a position to help those who are now facing adverse times. "God had a saving purpose in the cruel events in Joseph's life, which is part of the saving theme that runs throughout the book of Genesis."[30]

[30] William David Reyburn, Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis, UBS Handbook Series* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1998), 1115.

Scholars and theologians argue that Joseph serves as a type of Christ. "The experience of Joseph at the hands of his then-evil brothers was a miniature demonstration of God's saving actions in Jesus, the Coming One. Here, the typology of Joseph is most strongly a pointer to the experience of the Savior."[31] Christ would endure the evil plan of men when He would be falsely accused, tried, crucified, and buried but the ultimate plan of God was at work because those evil actions were how God provided salvation to the world. "A type functions heuristically, allowing us to probe and appreciate in a fresh way that to which the type points, helping us to realize significance that we might have overlooked."[32] Stiekes suggests that the entire narrative of Joseph points to the coming of Christ. The gift, the suffering at the hands of those around Him, and the ultimate position of power and authority are Christological in nature. If you read this verse without placing it in the larger context of the narrative or the entire Bible, you will overlook the theological nod at what the coming of Jesus means to the world.

The words to are derived from the Hebrew word "maan" which is translated as purpose or intent.[33] In context, it means that Joseph is aware that everything he suffered had a reason attached to it. No suffering was wasted nor was it due to anything he had done. Joseph says to his brothers enduring the plan of man is what enables him to execute the plan of God. The word save used in most translations indicates that lives would be saved physically from death by famine. In Hebrew, the word saved is coupled with the

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[31] Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 83-84.

[32] Greg Stiekes, *Seeing Joseph as a Type of Christ,* BJU Seminary, https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/seeing-joseph-as-a-type-of-christ/.

[33] Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publication Inc, 1998).

word alive. It is to suggest that one would avoid death through the actions of another. Joseph's sufferings prepared him to be in a position to support those who were suffering. He can do this in his own life because God sustained him through his stewardship of the gift of dream interpretation, and that same gift enabled him to fulfill the purpose God had given him.

The narrative of Joseph in the Book of Genesis, especially the selected verses in the final chapter, should set the foundation for this Doctor of Ministry project by showcasing how one should seek to properly endure, interpret, and apply the fortitude, integrity, and character of Joseph. Joseph properly stewards both gift and grief in a way that glorifies God, fulfills God's purpose, and restores and preserves those who sought to bring about evil to him. Leaders in ministry contexts bring their gifts and griefs into their context, and the residue of both can be seen in how they lead. Unfortunately, many individuals find themselves in leadership roles without having adequately assessed the trials they have endured; thus, they are unable to apply the lessons they should have learned to become better, more godly leaders. Leading with unaddressed suffering can cause a leader to bring suffering to those who look to them for leadership in life and ministry. This will lead to a church that may never reach the intended position God has planned for it.

Annah Moyo-Kupeta of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation concludes that "Most of our contexts are wounded contexts, led by wounded individuals who exist in wounded communities and societies and are leading wounded institutions. The need for trauma-informed leadership, or leadership by leaders who are aware of their own trauma and how it can impact their effectiveness and success, cannot be

overemphasized."[34] She goes on to assert that "leaders who are aware of and addressing their trauma are empowered to create positive and peaceful relationships and environments, can contain their emotional reactions as well as those of others, and can handle contradicting and uncomfortable messages and feedback."[35] While Kupeta is addressing those who lead in the political contexts of the world, the tenets of her assessment can be applied to ministerial contexts as well. It is widely believed that congregations take on the personalities and ways of the leader, and if the leader is leading from a place of hurt and despair, it will be evident in how the congregation handles the trials they face in their personal lives.

More alarming is that followers can become wounded at the hands of leaders who mishandled themselves, creating a pattern and culture of mistreatment and deep-rooted angst against church and church leadership. Joseph serves as an example of how leaders who face even the worst of trials life and humanity have to offer can turn out to be some of the most outstanding leaders God intends to use. Through this biblical example, ministerial leadership can apply the principles and see a drastic shift in the culture and trajectory of their ministries.

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[34] Annah Moyo-Kupeta, "Wounded Leaders and Wounded Leadership," Global Initiative for Justice Truth and Reconciliation, https://gijtr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Wounded-Leaders-and-TJ.pdf.

[35] Annah Moyo-Kupeta, "Wounded Leaders and Wounded Leadership," Global Initiative for Justice Truth and Reconciliation, https://gijtr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Wounded-Leaders-and-TJ.pdf.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

History provides the backdrop and foundation upon which the future is built. Knowing the history of a thing can help you understand its current state. This is especially true as it relates to people and society. It has been said through the years that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. “We study history because history doesn’t stay behind us. Studying history helps us understand how past events have shaped the world as it is today. With lessons from the past, we not only learn about ourselves and how we came to be, but also develop the ability to avoid mistakes and create better paths for our societies.”[1] Observing and gaining an understanding of events in the past and their effect on the now future helps to not just avoid mistakes but also to make better decisions. That is to suggest that not all occurrences in the past are bad, in fact, much of the good done in the past is what helps to make the future better and create environments that promote positive actions and attitudes. Many cultures survive decades of change because they hold fast to the foundations laid in their history. Those foundations provide stability in uncertain times and prevent the culture from completely dying. “Without history we’re likely to repeat many of the worst parts of the past, and

[1] Mooc Blog Team, "Why Is It Important to Study History," Mooc, https://www.mooc.org/blog/why-is-it-important-to-study-history.

that erasing history would make the world a worse place, not a better one—i.e. it might eliminate hatred, but it would also eliminate wisdom."[2]

This chapter will focus on the importance of properly stewarding gifts and grief. The problem statement is grief has caused ministry leaders to mishandle their gifts and create unhealthy leadership habits. The hypothesis statement is if the leaders participate in practical training and teaching, then they will be equipped to develop habits that will help them handle their grief and enable them to properly steward gifts. The stewarding of gifts promotes ministry growth and personal growth within the leader. Sadly, many leaders have failed to recognize and understand the importance of not allowing personal struggles to impact their gifts and how they utilize those gifts negatively.

Leaders within most spiritual and religious communities are charged with the responsibility of shepherding and educating congregations on experiencing, expressing, and enduring grief in many forms. Whether through formal or informal training, walking with congregants through periods of grief is one of the paramount responsibilities taught to ministry leaders. They are called upon to be a source of comfort, encouragement, and hope. Throughout centuries of church and religion, much has been learned and taught about leadership, especially leading others through periods of grief. Countless books and manuals contain valuable content for leaders to draw upon and utilize as they interact with those seeking their guidance. This content is made possible through the means of studying the lives of those who experience great grief. From these real-life experiences, valuable lessons can be constructed and shared with those who seek to lead and guide others through similar life experiences. "Through study of the past, we understand our

[2] Tim Urban, "Would Erasing All Human Knowledge of History Be a Good Thing?" Wait But Why, https://waitbutwhy.com/table/erase-human-history.

own lives better. We see patterns as they re-emerge and take solace in the fact that others have gone through similar struggles."[3]

For leaders, it becomes essential that they not only study the content to help others but also take a close look at the lives of those who lead others and experience grief. Those people become examples of how to find the fortitude and the discipline not to allow personal circumstances to dictate how they lead others through similar circumstances. They teach how to navigate life's twists and turns without succumbing to the traps of emotional and spiritual burnout. It gives credence to the age-old saying that most life lessons are better caught than taught. This suggests that most of what we learn is by watching the lives of others and taking notes. What to do and not to do is often learned from what has been done and what has not been done. While one could argue that no two situations are the same, the lessons learned by someone who has gone through it can help others understand their situation better and handle it more effectively. Rachel Gilson suggests, "Trials and blessings shape us. Whether through the formative seasons of childhood, grief, or celebration, we carry with us the unique culmination of the plot points our divine Author planned for us before we were born."[4] It is the shaping by trials and blessings that we understand God's purpose and intentions for our lives. God orchestrates our lives and gives us the free will to choose, but I believe that we are guided by those trials to help make better free will decisions.

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[3] Mooc Blog Team, "Why Is It Important to Study History," Mooc, https://www.mooc.org/blog/why-is-it-important-to-study-history.

[4] Rachel Gilson, "Stewarding Your Gifts As a Storyteller Involves More Than Honing Techniques," Story Embers: Guiding and Inspiring Christian Storytellers, https://storyembers.org/stewarding-your-gifts-as-a-storyteller-involves-more-than-honing-techniques/.

The Bible offers examples of this with characters whose lives are marked by episodes that seem like detours but ultimately turn out to be pivotal developments in their destiny. One example of this is the life of Joseph, who was gifted by God to interpret dreams and by his biological father with a coat of many colors, which symbolized a form of favoritism. These gifts made him a target of jealousy and envy from his brothers, who devised a plan to, in essence, remove Joseph from their lives. In doing so, it led to Joseph experiencing a series of life-threatening and altering events. Joseph displays a level of spiritual fortitude and character that sustained him during those series of events and ultimately led to his rise to a position of prominence. In that position, he comes face-to-face with his brothers and chooses to extend mercy instead of seeking revenge. Joseph's life serves as an example to others who are gifted. This is an example that displays the importance of proper focus and stewardship of gifts while experiencing grief of any kind.

Joseph's character and integrity can be attributed to his faith in God. His faith demonstrated his trust in God to protect and preserve him to accomplish the purpose God had for him. This demonstration of faith and trust can also be seen in famed American lawyer, businessman, and devout Christian Horacio Spafford. Spafford, who would, after a series of grievous experiences, write one of the most notable and beloved hymns, "It Is Well with My Soul." By taking a closer look at what Spafford experienced and how he navigated the aftermath, an example of how to steward gift and grief properly will be evident. This historical foundation chapter will focus on the life of Spafford and the tools that can be taken from it and applied to those who find themselves in similar situations.

Horatio Spafford

Spafford was born on October 20, 1828, in North Troy, New York. His father, Horatio G. Spafford, Sr., was "an inventor, author, editor, and entrepreneur, who corresponded with Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison."[5] Due to his father's success and influence, Horacio was exposed to the best of education and schools. After matriculating through grade school, he attended law school and earned his law degree from the University of New York. He would then move to Chicago in 1853 and establish a successful law practice that provided services to several high-profile business figures. Spafford was not only a lawyer but also a devout Christian. Furthermore, Spafford served as an elder in the Presbyterian Church.[6] He also served as a Sunday school teacher in his local church, Fullerton Avenue Presbyterian Church, and volunteered to work in ministry with his good friend, D.L. Moody. While serving, he met Anna Lawson, who was fourteen years his junior. He waited until she reached the legal age of marriage before marrying her in 1861.[7]

He and his wife had five children together, and according to society, even today's society, they were living the good life. A successful career, family, and ministry work for the believer can appear to be the perfect life. However, this beautiful life took a turn for the worse. Spafford exemplified the words of Job 14:1, "Man who is born of a woman is

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[5] Russell D. Moore, "Horacio Spafford: It Is Well With My Soul," Christianity.com, https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/horatio-spafford-it-is-well-with-my-soul-11633070.html.

[6] Library of Congress Editors, "The American Colony in Jerusalem," Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/americancolony/amcolony-family.html.

[7] Russell D. Moore, "Horacio Spafford: It Is Well With My Soul," Christianity.com, https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/horatio-spafford-it-is-well-with-my-soul-11633070.html.

few of days and full of trouble." The Bible and history teach us that no man or woman is above experiencing moments of grief. Grief is not always the loss of a person, but it can be any number of things.

In the life of Spafford, grief arrived in his life when, in 1870, his only son died from scarlet fever. While navigating the obvious waves of grief a year later, his family's life was shaken again. Due to his success, he was able to purchase a home in the northern Chicago area. The house was often used as "a meeting place for activists in the reform movements of the time, such as Frances E. Willard, president of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union, and evangelical leaders like Dwight Moody, who ignited a religious revival in America and Europe."[8] On October 8, 1871, a fire broke out on the southside of Chicago. An article from National Geographic describes the fire:

> The Great Chicago Fire started on the evening of Oct. 8, 1871. While there is little doubt that the fire started in a barn owned by Patrick and Catherine O'Leary, the exact cause of the fire remains a mystery. From the barn at 137 DeKoven Street, on the city's southwest side, the fire spread north and east, into the heart of Chicago's business district. Rain put out the fire more than a day later, but by then it had burned an area 4 miles long and 1 mile wide. The fire destroyed 17,500 buildings and 73 miles of street. Ninety thousand people—one in three Chicago residents—were left homeless by the fire. While only 120 bodies were recovered, it is believed that 300 people died in the blaze.[9]

Although the fire did not directly impact Spafford's home, his law firm was significantly affected, and the partners incurred debt due to their investments in several real estate ventures.[10] Spafford was not present at the time of the fire, but he returned

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[8] Library of Congress Editors, "The American Colony in Jerusalem," Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/americancolony/amcolony-family.html.

[9] Mary Schons, "The Chicago Fire of 1871 and the Great Rebuilding," Education - National Geographic, https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/chicago-fire-1871-and-great-rebuilding/.

[10] Russell D. Moore, "Horacio Spafford: It Is Well With My Soul," Christianity.com, https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/horatio-spafford-it-is-well-with-my-soul-11633070.html.

home the next day. After receiving the news from his wife, he informed her of a meeting scheduled for the next day, and he would be attending to begin the work of aiding those affected.[11]As a leader in the church and community, Spafford found himself ministering to those who suffered loss while he was still grieving the loss of a son. This is a common occurrence for those who serve in ministry leadership capacities. Often, leaders are called to minister to the wounds of others while still attending to their own.

A true mark of a leader is the ability to serve while suffering. Tony Enns writes, "Not only *can* we serve others in our hardship, but it is in that service that the power of the gospel in our lives is most fully revealed."[12] It is through grief that the gospel is made real in the life of the believer. Spafford devoted himself to ensuring that the city was rebuilt and providing aid to those directly impacted by the fire. His heart for others allowed him to minister to their needs while being in need himself. C. Gene Wilkes suggests that "Servant leaders can risk serving others when they trust that God is in control of their lives."[13] Since they place their lives in God's hands, it frees their minds, hearts, and hands to serve others who may not have the same level of trust in God. This type of selflessness is rooted in a leader's desire to fulfill the call and purpose of their life. Spafford's actions during the rebuilding of the city exhibit the need for leaders to develop and exhibit the willpower to serve while suffering without causing more

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[11] Troi Penwell, *It Is Well: The Story of Horacio and Anna Spafford* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 73.

[12] Tony Enns, "Service and Suffering," Biblical Counseling, https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/service-and-suffering/#:~:text=Service%2C%20whether%20we%20are%20suffering,and%20our%20dependence%20on%20Him.&text=Not%20only%20can%20we%20serve,lives%20is%20most%20fully%20revealed.

[13] C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998), 26.

suffering. He could have used the loss of a child and the loss of investments as excuses not to show up for others.

Even in the face of opposition from those with whom he was in partnership, he chose to hold fast to his faith and trust in God. During the meeting to assess and address the damages of the fire, Spafford and others discussed what needed to be done. When it was expressed that a plan needed to be put in place, Spafford voiced, "God will show us the way."[14] His sentiments were met with opposition from his partner Henry McDaid. McDaid had already made it clear that he felt that "it's all gone. There is nothing more we can do." After Spafford's words, he said, "Don't talk to me about your God. I don't want to hear your 'everything will be alright if we just trust God's speech." McDaid continued by saying that unless God was providing millions of dollars, everything would not be alright. Spafford does not respond to his partner with words of anger or rebuke; he responds with scripture. Spafford calls the attention of those listening to the Old Testament narrative of Nehemiah. He informed them that in a similar situation, Nehemiah assessed the damages, gathered support, "and last but not least, he stayed focused and committed to complete the task."[15] Spafford then made the declaration, "There is no way Chicago is going to die in the dust. It will be rebuilt, and we will be part

[14] Tony Enns, "Service and Suffering," Biblical Counseling, https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/service-and-suffering/#:~:text=Service%2C%20whether%20we%20are%20suffering,and%20our%20dependence%20on%20Him.&text=Not%20only%20can%20we%20serve,lives%20is%20most%20fully%20revealed.

[15] Tony Enns, "Service and Suffering," Biblical Counseling, https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/service-and-suffering/#:~:text=Service%2C%20whether%20we%20are%20suffering,and%20our%20dependence%20on%20Him.&text=Not%20only%20can%20we%20serve,lives%20is%20most%20fully%20revealed.

of that process."[16] Spafford pulled his hope and trust in God from examining the experience of another leader who was faced with similar circumstances as he and the city of Chicago were facing. History informed and inspired him.

Leaders who draw their inspiration from others are more likely to avoid mistakes and make the necessary decisions for successful leadership. While we rely heavily on the scriptures for spiritual guidance, they can also serve as a historical reference point for navigating current circumstances. The history of the Bible offers spiritual principles to guide believers through their earthly existence. Great leaders of the Bible were not exempt from earthly trouble. In fact, it is how they endured earthly experiences that make them great leaders to glean from. Spafford's reference to Nehemiah not only expressed his belief in God but also his conviction that God would empower them in their efforts, much as He had done for Nehemiah. His reference was so impactful that even his friend Henry had to come back and apologize for his words, and it provided Spafford with the opportunity to evangelize to his friend by saying, "Don't forget, God and I haven't given up on you."[17]

After serving the community through his efforts to rebuild the ruins caused by the great fire, in 1873, Spafford and his wife, Anna, decided to take an extended trip to Europe. "At the last moment, Spafford was detained by the real estate business, but Anna and the four girls sailed to Paris on the steamer *Ville du Havre*. Within twelve minutes on

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[16] Tony Enns, "Service and Suffering," Biblical Counseling, https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/service-and-suffering/#:~:text=Service%2C%20whether%20we%20are%20suffering,and%20our%20dependence%20on%20Him.&text=Not%20only%20can%20we%20serve,lives%20is%20most%20fully%20revealed.

[17] Tony Enns, "Service and Suffering," Biblical Counseling, https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/service-and-suffering/#:~:text=Service%2C%20whether%20we%20are%20suffering,and%20our%20dependence%20on%20Him.&text=Not%20only%20can%20we%20serve,lives%20is%20most%20fully%20revealed.

November 21, 1873, the luxury steamer sank in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean after being rammed by the British iron sailing ship the *Lochearn*."[18] It is reported that it only took twelve minutes for the ship to sink into the depths of the ocean, killing two hundred and twenty-six passengers. All four of Spafford's daughters lost their lives in the shipwreck. His wife Anna and twenty-eight others miraculously survived the wreckage.[19] After making it to safety and receiving medical attention, Anna sent a telegram back home to Horacio.

> Handwritten cablegram, Atlantic Cable Message, The Western Union Telegraph Company. To [Horatio Gates] Spafford, 159 LaSalle St., Chicago [law office of H. G. Spafford]. Received at Chicago, Ill., Dec. 2d, 5:40 AM, 1873. "Saved alone what shall I do. Mrs [Daniel] Goodwin [friend] Children [Annie, Maggie, Bessie, and Tanetta Spafford] Willie Culver [neighbor boy] lost go with [Rev.] Lorriaux [French minister, a fellow survivor of shipwreck] until answer reply . . . Paris. [Anna] Spafford.[20]

Spafford later framed this telegram and hung it in his office. When asked about the moments during and after the collision, Anna stated to a fellow survivor, "God gave me four daughters. Now, they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why."[21] One could only imagine the pain and agony that Spafford was experiencing. To lose a child, then lose investment properties, and now to lose four daughters at one time would certainly qualify as a grievous time. Couple that with the fact that he was still

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[18] Library of Congress Editors, "The American Colony in Jerusalem," Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/americancolony/amcolony-family.html.

[19] Russell D Moore, "Horacio Spafford: It Is Well With My Soul," Christianity.com, https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1801-1900/horatio-spafford-it-is-well-with-my-soul-11633070.html.

[20] Anna Spafford, "American Colony in Jerusalem Collection: Part 1:Telegram from Anna Spafford to Horacio Gates Spafford Re: Being "Saved Alone" Among Her Traveling Party in the Shipwreck of the Viulle du Havre," Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/mamcol.011/.

[21] Craig Richardson, "Story Behind the Song: It Is Well With My Soul," St. Augustine, https://www.staugustine.com/story/lifestyle/faith/2014/10/17/story-behind-song-it-well-my-soul/985525007/.

responsible for serving others, and you have the makings of great internal conflict and chaos. The question becomes how one finds the strength and courage to keep serving. This portion of Spafford's life would perhaps be a perfect example of what it means when Jesus is referred to as a suffering servant. A life filled with suffering but fueled by serving. You cannot deny the presence and possibility of human suffering. Still, as a spiritual leader, you must somehow find the fortitude to remain faithful to the assignment placed in your hands. Spafford turned to his strong and tested faith in God to help him navigate this season of his life. Even those who debate the theological accuracy of the hymn he would later write, "It Is Well With My Soul," would have to say that Spafford "should be viewed as one who singularly trusted God in the midst of tragedy."[22]

Spafford traveled to be with his wife Anna with a grieving heart and troubled Spirit, he wrote the world-renowned and beloved hymn, "It Is Well With My Soul." "On the Atlantic crossing, the captain of his ship called Horatio to his cabin to tell him that they were passing over the spot where his four daughters had perished. He wrote to Rachel, his wife's half-sister, "On Thursday last, we passed over the spot where she went down, in mid-ocean, the waters three miles deep. But I do not think of our dear ones there. They are safe, folded, the dear lambs."[23]

Spafford wrote:

> When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
> When sorrows like sea billows roll;
> Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say
> It is well, it is well, with my soul.

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[22] Kenneth Berding, "Was Horacio Spafford a False Teacher When He Wrote 'It Is Well With My Soul'," Biola, https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2020/was-horatio-spafford-a-false-teacher-when-he-wrote-it-is-well-with-my-soul.

[23] Library of Congress Editors, "The American Colony in Jerusalem," Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/americancolony/amcolony-family.html.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.
My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
A song in the night, oh my soul![24]

In what is certain to be great pain, Spafford wrote a hymn to no doubt comfort himself but a hymn that would bring comfort to generations to follow. Whether we know he intended to do so or not, he was able to create something in his time of grief that would bring comfort to others when they faced grief. A mark of a true leader is the ability to find comfort in circumstances that can be applied to not just their life but to the lives of those who would encounter them and their work. While it may not have been his initial intent, the result of him finding the willpower in his suffering to properly manage the grief is what made it beneficial to others. Spafford proves that it is possible to manage grief in a way that is productive and not destructive. Often, when facing times of suffering and grief, leaders tend to "bleed" on others due to not properly processing and

[24] Horacio Spafford, "It Is Well With My Soul Lyrics," Amazing Hymns, https://amazinghymns.com/it-is-well-with-my-soul/.

managing what they feel. “Sung the world over, it has ministered to millions. And probably why it resonates so deeply, is that for Horatio Spafford, the author, these lyrics are autobiographical.”[25] Spafford was able to channel his grief into something that ministered to others. He used his life to express his feelings about God, even in the midst of his suffering. “Despite the years of tragedy, he and his wife had endured, these lyrics are a testament to his faith and trust in God.”[26] A God that Spafford believed was with him even in his suffering. Spafford’s life could be compared to the life of Joseph, who endured many grievous turns, but throughout the narrative in Genesis, we find the words, “The LORD was with Joseph” (Gn. 39:2).

Spafford and his wife returned to Chicago to try to make sense of what they had experienced and try to piece their lives back together. It was Spafford’s good friend and ministry colleague, Rev. D.L. Moody, who offered advice to Spafford’s wife Anna. “Annie, you must go into my work,” Rev. Moody said. “You must be so busy helping those who have gone into the depths of despair that you will overcome your own affliction by bringing comfort and salvation to others.”[27] These words to Anna seemed to echo the Spafford’s sentiments. They would give birth to three children: Horacio (1875), Bertha (1878), and Grace (1880).[28] They began holding Bible studies and prayer

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[25] Veigel Scott, "It Is Well with My Soul: Can You Say That?,” Wisdom in All Things, https://www.wisdominallthings.com/it-is-well-with-my-soul-can-you-say-that/.

[26] Veigel Scott, "It Is Well with My Soul: Can You Say That?,” Wisdom in All Things, https://www.wisdominallthings.com/it-is-well-with-my-soul-can-you-say-that/.

[27] Issabella Alden, “Horacio Spfford's Second Chapter,” Isabella Alden, https://isabellaalden.com/2017/08/28/horatio-spaffords-seconchapter/#:~:to%2C%20too%2C%20began%20to%20search,special%20place%20in%20particular%3A%20Jerusalem.

[28] Issabella Alden, “Horacio Spfford's Second Chapter,” Isabella Alden, https://isabellaalden.com/2017/08/28/horatio-spaffords-seconchapter/#:~:to%2C%20too%2C%20began%20to%20search,special%20place%20in%20particular%3A%20Jerusalem.

meetings in their home at Lake View. Much like in past times of suffering and trial, Spafford sought ways to channel his suffering into service for others. He "began to search his life and his faith for an explanation of their loss. As a result, he felt increasingly drawn to a life of service to God, and he felt called to one special place in particular: Jerusalem."[29]

Spafford shared what was on his heart in a letter. In the letter, he shared, "Jerusalem is where my Lord lived, suffered, and conquered, and I, too, wish to learn how to live, suffer and, especially, to conquer."[30] Spafford decided to move his family from America to Jerusalem in 1881, and "they led a small group of like-minded American Christians to Jerusalem, where they established a Christian society known as the "American Colony."[31] This American colony was not set up as just a religious center for Christians but rather Spafford would focus on servicing the entire surrounding community with essential needs regardless of religious affiliations. "The American Colony provided service to others in any way they could. They ran soup kitchens, hospitals, and orphanages. They soon became trusted friends among the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian residents of Jerusalem."[32]Again, Spafford was able to find purpose in his

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[29] Issabella Alden, "Horacio Spfford's Second Chapter," Isabella Alden, https://isabellaalden.com/2017/08/28/horatio-spaffords-seconchapter/#:~:to%2C%20too%2C%20began%20to%20search,special%20place%20in%20particular%3A%20Jerusalem.

[30] Issabella Alden, "Horacio Spfford's Second Chapter," Isabella Alden, https://isabellaalden.com/2017/08/28/horatio-spaffords-seconchapter/#:~:to%2C%20too%2C%20began%20to%20search,special%20place%20in%20particular%3A%20Jerusalem.

[31] Issabella Alden, "Horacio Spfford's Second Chapter," Isabella Alden, https://isabellaalden.com/2017/08/28/horatio-spaffords-seconchapter/#:~:to%2C%20too%2C%20began%20to%20search,special%20place%20in%20particular%3A%20Jerusalem.

[32] Issabella Alden, "Horacio Spfford's Second Chapter," Isabella Alden, https://isabellaalden.com/2017/08/28/horatio-spaffords-seconchapter/#:~:to%2C%20too%2C%20began%20to%20search,special%20place%20in%20particular%3A%20Jerusalem.

suffering and, through the American Colony, touched the lives of thousands of men, women, and children through his philanthropic efforts. Also, he, his family, and others serving with him would bring countless souls to Christ.

Spafford's health took a turn in 1888 when he caught a fever that would develop into malaria. Spafford's final days were spent in bed and unconscious most days with his family sitting at his bedside. Aside from a few moments of weak speech, he was not able to speak much. He died in his sleep on October 16, 1888, at the age of 59.[33]

Throughout his life, Spafford was intimately acquainted with Peter's words; "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Pt. 4:12).[34] His life is a picture of what it means to find joy in sorrow. At every turn in life, he found himself seeking to serve others through his sufferings. It was clear through his actions that he placed his faith and total trust in Jesus and that God was ultimately in control of his life. Service to God was his way of showing his gratitude for God keeping him in spite of life's challenges. In great grief, he found a way to provide for others what he himself needed. This is what made his life so impactful. Not his successes, though they were great, but his service to man considering his struggles. That is the mark of a leader who leads by following Christ and trusts God to direct their path.

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[33] Issabella Alden, "Horacio Spfford's Second Chapter," Isabella Alden, https://isabellaalden.com/2017/08/28/horatio-spaffords-seconchapter/#:~:to%2C%20too%2C%20began%20to%20search,special%20place%20in%20particular%3A%20Jerusalem.

[34] Kosinski Trust, "It Is Well With My Soul," Spafford Hymn, https://www.spaffordhymn.com/horatio-spafford.

Conclusion

The purpose of this historical chapter is to provide insight into the life of someone who, in the face of grief, was able to manage the grief and lead others properly. History often provides snapshots of situations that offer us examples of how we can overcome and navigate life's trials. The problem statement for this project is that leaders struggle with stewarding grief and gifts. Meaningful leaders often struggle to lead effectively when they face grief in their personal lives. The hypothesis is that if the leaders of the church participate in a six-week study on stewarding gifts and grief, they will exhibit leadership skills that foster personal and ministerial growth. This study will not only cover biblical principles but also include real-life examples, such as those of Spafford, to help guide the study. The relevance of this study extends not only to my personal life or the life of Spafford but also to sharing with various church ministers; we all face seasons of grief. The misconception seems to be that those who serve God in leadership roles are above the effects of grief. Primarily because we are the ones who are at the forefront of helping others navigate their times of grief, whether it is providing counseling, performing funeral or memorial services, serving as chaplains in medical facilities, or just being the "family preacher," leaders are called upon to lead even when they are going through seasons of grief.

The life of Horacio Spafford serves as the focal point of this chapter. His life was saturated with grief. From the loss of investment properties in the Chicago fires of 1871 to the loss of his four daughters in the shipwreck of the Ville du Havre in 1873, and later losing his son, Horacio, to scarlet fever, Horacio exhibited a steadfast faith and trust in God that led him to continue to serve and lead. He chose to find ways to provide

resources and spiritual guidance to those in need during his own time of need. He took the pain in his heart and wrote one of the most widely known hymns in the world, “It Is Well with My Soul.” In the twilight of his life, he moved to Jerusalem and founded the American Colony, which served thousands of people in the area regardless of their religious affiliation.

When we examine Spafford’s life and compare it to Joseph's, we find several commonalities. One that cannot be overlooked is the importance of them believing that even in those times of suffering, God was with them. We do not find in the scriptures that God spoke to Joseph, and in the life of Spafford, he does not share that he heard from God, but what we do see is these men relied heavily on their faith in God to guide them to make what they felt were the best decisions. It is those decisions that this project will focus on. The decision to continue to use their God-given gifts to serve others even in times of experiencing personal grief.

The Mayo Clinic offers a practical, working definition of grief. “Grief is the natural reaction to loss. Grief is both a universal and a personal experience. Individual experiences of grief vary and are influenced by the nature of the loss. Some examples of loss include the death of a loved one, the ending of an important relationship, job loss, loss through theft, or the loss of independence through disability.”[35] Understanding that grief comes in many forms, not just in the physical loss of a loved one, is part of the issue leaders face as it relates to stewarding grief. Most of what they encounter is not considered grief, but anything that invokes a feeling of loss is grief.

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[35] Mayo Clinic, “What Is Grief?,” Mayo Clinic, https://www.mayoclinic.org/patient-visitor-guide/support-groups/what-is-grief#:~:text=Grief%20is%20a%20strong%2C%20sometimes,someone%20they%20love%20have%20received.

Another major theme in the life of Joseph and Spafford is that they seemed to have a sense of understanding why they were suffering. Joseph expresses this at the end of his narrative. In the face of those brothers who caused him grief, he says, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good," in order to preserve numerous people, as he is doing today (Gn. 50:19,20). Spafford, throughout his suffering, reminded those around him that he believed that God had a purpose for his suffering. Medical experts at the May clinic suggest that "those grieving realize they can't control the process and to prepare for varying stages of grief. Understanding why they're suffering can help."[36] For the believer, this is also true. Understanding that God is ultimately in control of everything that happens to us should cause us to rely on the same God to reveal the purpose behind what happens to us. Everything we go through has a God-given and God-intended purpose. Finding that purpose and intent is the understanding needed to endure properly and better. The attitude one has during those times is a clear indication of their level of trust and understanding. God controls what happens to us, and we are in control of how we receive and respond to what He allows to happen. Most times, you will discover that what happened to you was good for you and your spiritual growth and development.

It is in relinquishing control of what is happening that we find the strength and courage to trust God with why it is happening. Spafford and Joseph not only show us how to place our trust in God with what is happening but also how we should trust God to give us a purpose in our suffering. Properly stewarding grief and gifts is how we create

[36] Mayo Clinic, "What Is Grief?," Mayo Clinic, https://www.mayoclinic.org/patient-visitor-guide/support-groups/what-is-grief#:~:text=Grief%20is%20a%20strong%2C%20sometimes,someone%20they%20love%20have%20received.

an impact in the lives of those who will encounter our ministries. Drawing principles from the stories of others and developing a strong faith are key to successful leadership, even in the face of personal grief.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The question of why God, in all God's omnipotence, allows suffering to not just exist but to be prevalent in the lives of those who profess belief in God is one that continues to be debated in theological circles around the world. The term used to describe this great debate is theodicy. "Theodicy from the Greek words θεός (*theos*) (God) and δίκη (*dikē*) (justice), translating to "divine justice."[1] The attempt to defend God's omnipotence and goodness in the face of the problem of evil in the world."[2] "The term 'theodicy' was first used by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in his treatise on this subject published in 1710."[3] In defense of God's omnipotence, "It seeks to answer how a benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient God allows suffering and pain in His creation."[4] The presence of evil or suffering in the world is an issue that can be complex and create deep philosophical and theological streams of thought. These concepts and thoughts have even led to the formation of many reformations within denominations and

[1] Page Brooks and D. A. Neal, "Theodicy," eds. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 1232.

[2] Brooks and Neal, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary,* 1232.

[3] S. A. Oliver, "Theodicy," eds. Martin Davie et al., *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 897.

[4] Brooks and Neal, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, 1233.

spiritual groups. Across the spectrum of religious belief and practice, there are countless perspectives and accepted concepts on the issue. Many adopt concepts that suggest that suffering serves as a means for testing faith and fostering spiritual growth or is a consequence of the free will of humankind. Although there are differing ideas of what suffering is and why it is allowed, many agree that, ultimately, suffering finds its way into the lives of believers as part of God's plan for their lives. "The basic answer to the problem of evil given by the classic view is that no evil takes place unless God permits it, and that God has a good reason for permitting each evil, which takes the form of a greater good that he uses the evil to bring about."[5] This suggests that suffering has a purpose in our lives and finding the meaning of that purpose will offer a semblance of understanding the mystery of why God allows it to happen in the world and more importantly in our personal life. This chapter aims to provide the reader with insight that will enable them to properly assess their own suffering and, consequently, guide leaders in navigating their suffering to help others cope with it in their own lives. One way to accomplish this is to first properly assess God's purpose for allowing and product acquired from suffering.

This topic is crucial to this project, given the issue identified within my ministry context. The problem statement of this project is grief has caused ministry leaders to mishandle their gifts and create unhealthy leadership habits. This suggests that there are times when leaders, especially those in ministry, fail to process and endure suffering because they do not understand the purpose of suffering in their lives. The hypothesis statement is if the leaders of the church participate in practical training and teaching, then they will be equipped to develop habits that will help them handle grief and enable them

[5] Phillip Cary, "A Classic View," in *God and the Problem of Evil: Five Views*, eds. Chad Meister and James K. Dew Jr. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 14.

to properly steward gifts. Those skills will be developed through assessing what they are facing and then applying what they gain from it to become better ministers or leaders. These tools are key to the success of a ministry. Without the proper skills to navigate seasons of suffering, leaders often make decisions that lead to more personal suffering and suffering that touches and impacts their respective ministries.

Peter Hicks suggests that when considering the purpose or reason for suffering, we should look at the Bible in reverse. In his book *The Message of Evil and Suffering: Light into Darkness,* Hicks suggests:

> We are going to start our study of evil and suffering in the bible at the end of the story. That is because, although for us humans suffering and evil are a mystery, they are not a mystery to God, who stands behind the whole story of planet Earth. He knows the answer. He writes the end of the story. What is more, in the bible he has revealed to us enough of that answer to enable us to cope with the tough chapters that make up the main part of the story. By being aware of the future we can live through the present.[6]

A prime example of this type of thinking toward suffering can be found in the narrative of Joseph. Joseph faced challenges early in his life simply because he was gifted and shared that gift with those around him. As he suffered, we discover that Joseph's suffering was tethered to a God-given and God-driven purpose. "By Joseph's own testimony, his sufferings—physical, mental, and emotional agonies—had been allowed by God so that he could fulfill God's plan: to save many lives. But as for you [Joseph's brothers who had sold him into slavery many years previously], ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."[7] Joseph is

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[6] Peter Hicks, *The Message of Evil and Suffering: Light into Darkness*, ed. Derek Tidball (Nottingham, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 15.

[7] John Charles Rye, "How God Uses Suffering: A Biblical Example," Institute in Basic Life Principles, https://iblp.org/how-god-uses-suffering-a-biblical-example/.

able to look back at the suffering he endured and properly assess it. He states that his suffering had a purpose much larger than himself. His suffering was God-given, just like his gift. Joseph's assessment of his suffering is what I believe leaders should look to when they face suffering themselves. Suffering always has a purpose greater than the person suffering. "Suffering is not only functional, it serves the greater good!"[8] With the countless number of differing beliefs and interpretations of what suffering is, its nature, and its relationship to God, it is important to understand that wrestling with the existence of suffering is personal and often leads to introspection, empathy, and a more in-depth and personal understanding of the human experience. It is something that everyone experiences, but not everyone understands. This creates a vast number of possible beliefs and practices used for navigating suffering.

In previous chapters, we also examined the life of Horatio Spafford, who suffered many grievous things in life and found a way to turn those moments of suffering into a means by which he could serve others. In October 1870, Horacio and his young family suffered the loss of his son, Horatio Jr., and then just a year later when, a massive fire hit downtown Chicago, causing Horatio to suffer property loss. Instead of wallowing in his suffering, Horatio felt the need to find ways to serve others. "That day, almost 300 people lost their lives, and around 100,000 were made homeless. Despite their substantial financial loss, the Spaffords sought to demonstrate the love of Christ by assisting those who were grief-stricken and in great need."[9] Stafford exhibits the behavior that I feel

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[8] Mike Brooks, "The Purpose and Problem of Suffering," Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/tech-happy-life/202201/the-purpose-and-problem-suffering#:~:text=Suffering%20is%20not%20only%20functional,that%20are%20good%20for%20us.

[9] Paul Nel, "Horatio Gates Spafford - The Story Behind the Hymn 'It Is Well with My Soul,'" Bethel Church Ripon, https://www.bethelripon.com/life-stories/horatio-gates-spafford.

leaders should emulate. He was able to serve while suffering and not let suffering hinder his ability or lessen his desire to serve. That behavior is when we are most Christ-like. "Your suffering has a sanctifying purpose; it is meant to deepen your relationship with Jesus, that you may 'know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."[10]

Purpose of Suffering

> Melvin Tinker juxtaposes suffering with teleology. He writes:
>
> Beneath the heartfelt cry 'Why this suffering?' often lies the longing for a purpose. 'What is the point in all this?' is a cry in which the tension is heightened when, as we have seen, meaning and creative purpose seem to be absent from the situation and we are apparently left with 'meaningless suffering' or 'senseless violence.' Thus, rather than looking back for an explanation in terms of causation, here one looks forward for an explanation in terms of purpose (teleology).[11]

"Teleology is the study of purposes, goals, ends, and functions."[12] In simple terms, "Teleological explanations attempt to explain X by saying that X exists or occurs for the sake of Y."[13] On the matter of the purpose of suffering in the world, Joni Eareckson Tada shares the words spoken to her by Steve Estes who told her, "God permits what He hates to accomplish what He loves."[14] Estes words highlight what I believe is the secret to

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[10] Paul Tautges, "You Are Called to Suffer with Christ," Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/you-are-called-to-suffer-with-christ/#:~:text=Instead%2C%20your%20suffering%20has%20a,(Philippians%203%3A10).

[11] Melvin Tinker, "Purpose in Pain?—Teleology and the Problem of Evil," *Themelios* 16, no. 3 (1991): 16.

[12] Andrew Woodfield, "Teleology," Teleology - Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/teleology/v-1.

[13] Andrew Woodfield, "Teleology," Teleology - Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/teleology/v-1.

[14] Joni Ereckson Tada, "Turning Evil on Its Head," Ligonier Ministries, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/turning-evil-its-head.

accepting and properly assessing the purpose of suffering. God uses suffering to accomplish His will on earth. Throughout the Bible, we find scripture that supports this stream of thought and belief. So then, while God does issue punishment as a consequence of sin, not all suffering is a result of an individual's sin. We find biblical characters, like Joseph, who accomplish major feats either through suffering or as a result of suffering. Some scholars debate that the onset of Joseph's suffering came as a result of the perceived arrogance he exhibited when he first shared his gift of interpreting dreams with his family, while others suggest that his suffering was due to his brother's response to hearing circumstances they did not like. Layton Talbert examines these differing views of Joseph's plight in his article, "Was Joseph Cocky, Dumb, or What?" Talbert shares, that Douglas Stuart insists that "Joseph's narration of his dreams reflects straightforward arrogance" while Waltke (he notes) sees Joseph as a "spoiled brat, talebearer, braggart" (*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* [4th ed.], p. 100)."[15] Talbert offers his rebuttal by writing, "As far as the narrative is concerned, Joseph was neither arrogant nor naive in telling the dreams to his brothers; he was right. Famed expositor James Montgomery Boice conceded that the case for Joseph's naivete is plausible but considered it much more likely that Joseph sensed a God-given responsibility to make a divine revelation such as this known."[16] Talbert suggests that suffering is not intended to distract or destroy, nor is it always a punishment for sin; rather, God uses it as a tool for fulfilling one's duty on earth. Suffering then becomes a means by which God develops

[15] Layton Talbert, "Was Joseph Cocky, Dumb, or What?," BJU Seminary, https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/was-joseph-cocky-dumb-or-what/#:~:text=As%20far%20as%20the%20narrative,his%20brothers%3B%20he%20was%20right.

[16] Layton Talbert, "Was Joseph Cocky, Dumb, or What?," BJU Seminary, https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/was-joseph-cocky-dumb-or-what/#:~:text=As%20far%20as%20the%20narrative,his%20brothers%3B%20he%20was%20right.

those He intends to use. The development of gifts, character, strength, integrity, and other necessary traits for leadership, born through suffering, is then used as a tool to accomplish a person's God-given purpose. "The Bible teaches that all suffering is a result of sin (Rom. 5:12) but all suffering is not a consequence of personal sin (Jn. 9:2-3). To blame someone's suffering on his sin is often presumptuous, usually unhelpful, and almost always simplistic."[17] Leaders must understand that not all suffering is due to a mistake that was made, but rather, it is part of their spiritual maturation process.

Joseph had to hone his gift, so God placed him in a position to exercise it, even if it meant he would face suffering as a result. It is in that suffering Joseph learns to rely on God as his protector. God protects us even when we suffer, as it is written, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). This verse in Psalm chapter forty-six suggests that God is our shelter and strength in times of suffering. It is essential to believe that God is present with us, even in suffering, and that He will provide the strength needed to endure it. "God knows our suffering and tears. He sees how we suffer and He is near to us in our suffering."[18] Many have given up on assignments due to feeling that in times of suffering, God had somehow forsaken them. If you carefully examine Joseph's narrative, you do not find any words spoken by God to Joseph. However, without a word from God, he shows a resolve to keep doing what he believes God has called him to do. Unlike Joseph, we have the Bible to help aid us

[17] Blake Glosson, "In Suffering, God Isn't (Simply) Teaching You a Lesson," The Gospel Coalition, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/suffering-god-teach-lesson/.

[18] Nathan Thiry, "God Is with Us in Our Suffering," Faith Bible Church, https://fbchurch.org/resource/god-is-with-us-in-our-suffering.

in times of suffering. We rely on scripture to help us accept, understand, and endure suffering.

The Bible is filled with scripture that offers hope amid suffering. One is found in 2 Corinthians 4:8, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." These verses suggest that while we will face many types of suffering, it will not overwhelm us. With such biblical backing, it becomes vital that leaders rely on God's word when wrestling with the purpose of their own suffering. We understand that God speaks through His word, so the believer must know what the word says regarding suffering.

> Paul stated, 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us', and 'our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all'.[8] Peter encouraged his readers to put up with all the suffering they were facing because God 'has given us new birth into a living hope … an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.'[19]

The scriptures Hicks references, along with others, highlight that our suffering is not eternal but has eternal implications. Implications of glory are greater than the agony and pain of the suffering they will endure.

When leaders suffer and lack a firm understanding of what scripture says about suffering, they mishandle suffering and then lead with what they suffer from at the forefront of their leadership. Understanding the purpose of your personal struggles will cause you to avoid your wounds bleeding into the circumstances of others. It is vital for spiritual leaders to lead by example, providing practical guidance on how to endure

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[19] Hicks, *The Message of Evil and Suffering: Light into Darkness*, 16.

suffering while embracing and further developing a sense of connection to their beliefs. If a leader can show their followers how to endure by living it out before them, it then makes what they preach more practical to the listener. The disconnect comes when leaders try to lead with the "do as I say, not as I do" approach to leadership. I often heard older people in my home church say, "follow me, as I follow Christ." That phrase seemed trivial to me as a boy, but now it makes all the sense in the world. Their sharing their testimony and following it with that phrase was to suggest that they suffered just as Christ suffered. John Huss writes:

> Christ suffered for His beloved; should we wonder then that He has left us His example, in order that we endure patiently ourselves all things for our own salvation? He is God and we are His creatures; He is the Lord and we are His servants; He is the master of the world and we are insignificant mortals; He has need of nothing, we are destitute of all; He has suffered, why should we not suffer likewise, especially when suffering is for us a purification?[20]

In his quote, Huss highlights the fact Christ left an example of how to endure suffering, knowing that suffering has a purpose greater than the one suffering.

Product of Suffering

If one believes that suffering has a purpose, it is safe to deduce that they also believe that suffering produces something for, in, or through them. Many believe that God allows suffering not just to accomplish God's will in the earth but also to develop those God allows to endure suffering. The Bible offers several scriptures to support this ideology. Most biblical scholars consider Romans 5:3-5 as the foundational scripture for providing a basis for enduring suffering. Paul writes, "Not only that, but we rejoice in our

[20] Rebecca Brant and Elliot Ritzema, "300 Quotations for Preachers From the Medieval Church," Biblia, https://biblia.com/api/plugins/embeddedpreview?resourceName=LLS%3A300QUOTMDVL CHRCH&layout=minimal&historybuttons=false&navigationbox=false&sharebutton=false.

sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom. 5:3-4). Paul encourages the church in Rome that suffering has benefits that lead to personal growth and development, ultimately producing hope for the believer. It means that God allows believers to develop and cultivate within themselves what is needed and necessary to endure future suffering. According to this verse, Paul informs readers that the ultimate product of suffering is hope for the believer. Hope for the believer in the future. A future absent of the trials of life and an end to all suffering. This idea of hope for the believer suggests that believers should maintain a positive outlook for the future, even in the face of complex or challenging circumstances. We know that suffering is an inescapable part of life; therefore, it becomes vitally important that we find and secure the hope needed to endure all suffering. It provides the foundation for motivation, comfort, resilience, and patience for the believer during uncertain times. Even when we do not have a clear view of the outcome, hope tells us that we believe things will ultimately work out for our good. This hope gives one the courage to move forward with confidence.

Suffering and uncertainty create a need for hope. "Scripture relates being without hope to being in the world without God: "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).[21] Hope is derived from God and His promises, with the ultimate promise being eternal life to those who put their faith in Him. "Having hope in the promised eternal life through faith in Christ

[21] Paul K. McAlister, "Hope," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 996.

changes how we live and has its own unique rewards."[22] The promise of eternal life is the basis of salvation and the pillar on which the gospel is sustained. "This Gospel is the only hope in the world today. Everything else has been tried and found wanting. Everything else has failed. You will not find hope with the philosophers or with the statesmen, and you will not find it in the so-called religions of the world."[23] Much like in discussing the purpose of hope, the product of hope points back to the importance of a leader knowing, believing, and trusting the word of God. It should be the foundation upon which all we do and believe. You are not and should never lead from a place of opinion or persuasion but with the word of God in the forefront. In doing so, you provide a false hope that will cause others to fall deeper into their suffering with no hope at all.

Spiritual leaders offer hope through what they teach, the path they guide their followers, and, most importantly, through their actions. Congregants attend churches week after week in search of hope. That hope is what they use to make it through life when they are not physically in the walls of the church and face life's challenges. It is through these means they provide spiritual guidance, support, and inspiration to those who follow their leadership. Teaching spiritual principles is great. Providing spiritual guidance and support is important. However, I believe that it is the actions of the spiritual leader that provide the most hope for followers. After all, they chose to become members of a particular church, and most often, this decision is made solely based on the preaching and teaching of the pastor or leader. While preaching and teaching initially draw them to

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[22] Ron Kellenher, "#265: Why Is Hope Important in the Christian Life?" Ron R. Kelleher, https://ronkelleher.com/265-hope-important-christian-life/.

[23] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Christianity—The Only Hope," in *Authentic Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 5.

the church and pastor, other factors contribute to their remaining as members. They observe how the pastor interacts with other congregants, their relationship with other leaders in the church, the types of organizations the leader is a part of, separate from the church, and many other things that the leader may not even consider the congregants to notice. Many congregants pay close attention to how their spiritual leader acts when they face personal struggles and times of suffering, especially if they are privy to those times in their leader's life. Some would say that their leader's conduct offers them a template of how they should conduct themselves in the world. I recall, as a boy, my mother and others telling me that I should be more like my pastor, not them. They believed that their leaders closely mimic Christ and that the leader serves as the ultimate example. It is the age-old principle of leading by example. This is accomplished by embodying the principles and virtues they teach. One of the responsibilities of a spiritual leader is to properly handle the influence they have on those they lead. That influence is not necessarily solicited or wanted, but it comes with the position of leadership. More than preaching and teaching, it is how the leader lives out what they teach and preach that is most impactful to followers. Many will question the validity of the content of sermons and Bible study lessons if they never see the leader living out the content or exhibiting the character of one who adheres to the content. They cannot live by the "Do as I say and not as I do" concept that many pass down. A paradox is often present in most churches when it comes to this matter. It is not that the congregants do not believe what is being preached or taught. The Bible or the gospel is not being questioned for the most part. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that "a majority have "a lot" of confidence in their clergy to give advice about clearly religious matters, such as growing

closer to God (68%). But fewer are very confident that their clergy could give advice about parenting, mental health problems or finances."[24] This finding suggests that some do not trust their leader to provide sound and practical advice in various circumstances. I believe that this is because many do not see their leader properly navigate similar circumstances. Unfortunately, the leaders seem to act as though they are not aware that they are being watched, or worse, they do not care that they are being watched. In either case, an issue arises that causes many leaders to lose the respect and influence they once held in their congregation and community.

With the evolution of social media, congregants have been given unprecedented access to leaders. Ways that I believe many great theologians of years past would say are too intrusive and detrimental to the overall well-being of a leader and their leadership. This has created a culture of transparency in the church that many leaders mishandle and often abuse. Having access to a leader for the purpose of counseling and guidance in times of suffering is part of the role of ministerial leadership, but access to their own suffering and struggles warrants another level of responsibility and accountability for the leader. A responsibility that I believe, in many instances, is far too great. It comes with too many innocent blind spots for the leader. In the same survey, the Pew Research Center shares that "fully a quarter or more of adults who go to religious services at least a few times a year say they would be "not too" or "not at all" comfortable speaking to their clergy about drug or alcohol issues, problems with anxiety or depression, or financial

[24] Pew Research Center, "Two Most Congregants Trust Clergy to Give Advice about Religious Issues, Fewer Trust Clergy on Personal Matters," Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/11/15/most-congregants-trust-clergy-to-give-advice-about-religious-issues-fewer-trust-clergy-on-personal-matters/.

difficulties."[25] I believe that this is due to congregants being exposed to the transgressions of leaders and the subsequent way that leaders handle the exposure. A vast majority of congregants lack the spiritual maturity to see and understand that their leader, while used by God, can not in any way be God. That is, they are not and should not be expected to be perfect and blameless. As a child, I vividly remember the level of respect given to spiritual leaders, which was due to the mystic qualities they possessed. We knew little about them, so we trusted them with our suffering. We trusted that they could handle anything, and when they suffered, they did so without any hardships or struggle. I fear that these days, that level of respect and reverence has declined drastically. It then becomes the goal of this project to take steps to restore that respect and reverence, which will foster healthier relationships between leaders and followers. When a church has healthy leader-to-follower relationships, it is then able to grow and impact the world through its ministries.

That impact is founded in the hope that comes from the witness of those who have endured suffering. Therefore, it becomes vitally important that leaders ground themselves in biblical principles and practices that enable them to endure suffering in a way that offers hope to those who look to them. Leaders are indeed just as human as those they lead; there is a level of responsibility that comes with leadership that separates leaders. The responsibility of leadership includes the responsibility for maintaining spiritual, emotional, and physical health, as well as supporting those who are suffering. When leaders suffer, it cultivates wisdom and humility. It should point others to Christ and the

[25] Pew Research Center, "Two Most Congregants Trust Clergy to Give Advice about Religious Issues, Fewer Trust Clergy on Personal Matters," Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/11/15/most-congregants-trust-clergy-to-give-advice-about-religious-issues-fewer-trust-clergy-on-personal-matters/.

cross while creating a path that God uses to prove God's faithfulness, ultimately strengthening hope in others. Christ's suffering is what our hope is founded on. So, hope without Christ and His suffering is not hope at all. Many would say that they hope not to suffer, but a believer in Jesus Christ finds hope in suffering. Christ suffered to bring hope, and when we suffer, we should find hope in our suffering through our relationship with Him.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the topic of theodicy. Theodicy is a theological concept that discusses God's role in human suffering. Many fail to recognize God's purpose in suffering. The topic sparks a debate that questions the existence of a benevolent God who allows His creation to experience suffering on earth. While many suggest that the presence of evil and suffering on the earth disproves the existence of God, the Bible offers evidence for the believer that suffering, too, is part of God's ultimate plan. Suffering has a purpose, and it produces hope for the believer. Theodicy is important for leaders to understand because it is their responsibility not only to teach about hope but also to model behavior that fosters hope in those who follow their leadership. The challenge is that the leader must first seek to discover and believe that there is a purpose in their suffering, guiding others to discover and believe it for themselves. Followers look to their leaders not just for advice but also for practical examples of how to endure suffering. Gone are the days of the "do as I say, not as I do" ministry leadership style. Leaders must be sincere and integral in how they present themselves to those they are charged to lead. However, if leaders fail to do this, they cease to provide the hope that

suffering is intended to produce in them, as the Bible suggests. Suffering produces characteristics and traits that enhance a leader's ability to lead others and themselves through times of adversity.

While several sources provide information on the topic of theodicy, this chapter highlights that the primary resource for the matter is the Bible. Scripture is the ultimate authority for spiritual leadership; therefore, a solid understanding of what the Bible says concerning the topic should serve as the foundation for not only personal living but also public leadership. When leaders fail to manage their suffering effectively, it becomes evident in their ability—or lack thereof—to guide others. This leads to declining and even failing ministries within the church. Ministry failure can almost always be traced back to deficits in leadership, and most of those deficits are due to personal struggles. Personal struggles create voids and deficiencies within the leader that often spill over into their respective ministries. To address declining ministries, this chapter aims to guide leaders in the direction of personal introspection, enabling them to identify areas where personal suffering has led to ministerial mistakes. Mistakes can be rectified and lead to ministry resurgence if properly managed and the principles gained are applied. No matter the type of suffering, how one assesses and applies it is what matters most. The ability to learn from one's mistakes and use the consequences to initiate positive change should be a character trait that all leaders of any kind seek to possess. As a leader, one must understand that change is inevitable and that, too, requires the ability to navigate the consequences of mistakes.

The resurgence of declining or failing ministries within a church can provide hope to those congregants who may have felt the impact of the decline. For most, leaving a

church is a difficult process. The years spent investing time into the work of the church create a bond that is not easily or readily breakable. Congregants will endure seasons of turbulence in a ministry because of their bonds with the church and its leader. It is up to the leader to understand and, in some way, capitalize on this loyalty. Not for selfish gain but for support in making the necessary corrections and adjustments when they make decisions that cause fracture within ministries. It will restore the breach in the leadership-to-follower relationship. Thus, creating a culture of healing that will open the door for followers to look again to leaders as a source for advice, guidance, and inspiration when they face suffering. Trust that a spiritual leader can provide the answers in those times is a sign of a healthy and thriving church. Spiritually healthy churches are led by spiritually healthy leaders who, in turn, produce spiritually healthy congregants. Those churches model a corporate behavior that reflects a profound understanding of suffering, creating an environment where those who suffer feel they have access to the tools needed to grow spiritually.

This resurgence in hope among congregants can also serve as motivation for the leader to continue on the path of personally understanding and handling suffering. Most often, leaders rely heavily on the health of their ministry to gauge their performance and build confidence. If a leader sees growth in ministry, it often leads to them feeling better about themselves, thus making wiser choices for themselves. They will be less likely to make the decisions that led to the damages caused in their personal life and the life of their ministry if they see positive or corrective changes. Therefore, hope becomes essential not only for the congregation but also for the leader. It is a hope that pushes them to provide more hope for others. An older pastor once shared with me that before

you feed them, you should taste the food yourself, and if you do not like it, do not give it to them. What he was saying was what is good for you is also good for them. The leader should not teach about making the right decisions and choices if they do not possess the skills to do the same. Both the pulpit and the pew should experience growth in the church. It is a beautiful sight to see when a church is growing, and it is obvious that the growth is due to the leaders growing as well. That is the hope of ministry.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

At the core of every theological concept and theory is how man interprets, accepts, rejects, and or responds to that concept or theory. Therefore, it becomes imperative that, at some level, human behavior must be examined to determine the best methods for teaching or applying a given theological concept. The intersection of theology and psychology has been a long-researched and widely discussed topic throughout the annals of history, spanning both theological studies and secular academia. Whether the cause of certain psychological responses is studied or methods for treating the results of psychological responses, it is evident that the need for the integrating of psychological concepts and practices within the realm of theological study and practice is crucial for the advancement of healthy theological teaching and training and help theologians better understand how individuals respond to religious practices and beliefs.

Therapist Johan Waseberg believes "psychology plays a significant role in analyzing theology. Psychology offers explanations and definitions for behaviors in connection to Christian ethics. Psychology verbalizes our theological feelings and behavior. Psychology helps to understand our theological narratives and the reasons

behind them."[1] As a result, many psychological practices have been integrated into theological fields of study. Integrating these practices has resulted in enhancing the understanding of human behavior, addressing mental health concerns within the church, a vast improvement in pastoral care and counseling, and they aid in fostering holistic spiritual growth in religious communities.

One such practice is a branch of psychotherapy known as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a form of psychological treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug use problems, marital problems, eating disorders, and severe mental illness.[2] The focus of CBT is for individuals to identify and correct negative thought patterns and behaviors that cause emotional distress. By discovering and developing healthier coping strategies, CBT provides individuals with tools to challenge negative beliefs about themselves and their experiences. This form of therapy is short-term and goal-oriented, which has proven highly effective in managing symptoms, ultimately improving overall well-being and quality of life.

Origins of CBT

The study and practice of CBT originated in the 1960s with the work of psychotherapist Dr. Aaron T. Beck. He is globally recognized as the father of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and one of the world's leading researchers in the field of

[1] Johan Waseberg, "The Dialogue Between Psychology and Theology," The American Association of Christian Counselors, https://aacc.net/2018/12/10/the-dialogue-between-psychology-and-theology/.

[2] APA Division 12, "What Is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?" American Psychological Association, https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/patients-and-families/cognitive-behavioral.

psychopathology. He is credited with shaping the field of mental health, and *The American Psychologist* has called him "one of the five most influential psychotherapists of all time."[3] With seventy years in the field, he is well-respected and widely published for his work and research. Many branches of psychotherapy credit him as the source and inspiration for new practices and concepts. His discovery and development of CBT ironically started when the results of his study with patients experiencing depression opposed what he had initially believed would be the outcome. He had begun research into "the psychoanalytic construct of depression to validate the tenets of psychoanalysis."[4] Beck's findings led him to develop a new theory of depression, one focused on underlying negative beliefs associated with loss and failure, rather than the psychoanalytic theory that depression is the result of hostility turned toward the self and that depressed patients have an innate need to suffer.[5] In short, the patient's depression was birthed from thoughts within themselves after suffering different forms of loss and self-perceived failures.

Beck coined these thoughts as automatic thoughts. These thoughts are spontaneous and most often negative in nature, representing an individual's immediate, unpremeditated interpretations of events.[6] Working collaboratively with patients, Beck was able to take those automatic thoughts and evaluate them along with

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[3] Judith Beck, "Dr. Aaron T. Beck," Beck Institute, https://beckinstitute.org/about/dr-aaron-t-beck/.

[4] Judith Beck, "Dr. Aaron T. Beck," Beck Institute, https://beckinstitute.org/about/dr-aaron-t-beck/.

[5] Judith Beck, "Dr. Aaron T. Beck," Beck Institute, https://beckinstitute.org/about/dr-aaron-t-beck/.

[6] Suma P. Chand, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," StatPearls, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/.

cognitive distortions to construct what he then called the "cognitive model."[7] This model is what many consider a straightforward, common-sense model that examines and explains the relationship between cognition, emotion, and behaviors. It emphasizes three aspects of cognition: automatic thoughts, cognitive distortions, and underlying beliefs or schemas.

Automatic thoughts shape both the individual's emotions and their actions in response to events. CBT is based on the observation that dysfunctional automatic thoughts that are exaggerated, distorted, mistaken, or unrealistic in other ways play a significant role in psychopathology.[8] These exaggerated thoughts can range from thoughts after insignificant events like someone not speaking to you due to being in a hurry. An example of a negative automatic thought in this scenario is for the person to believe that the other person did not speak because they no longer like them or even hate them, when in fact the person was just in a hurry and did not, in most cases, even notice the person having the negative thought. Cognitive distortions are errors in logic that lead to erroneous conclusions. Examples of cognitive distortions are dichotomous thinking, overgeneralization, mind reading, emotional reasoning, and many more. These thoughts are often preconceived and assumed before processing what took place. They resemble a form of prejudice. Underlying beliefs are just that, beliefs that a person brings into situations even before the situation takes place. Core beliefs and intermediate beliefs constitute the make-up of this aspect of cognition. "Belief systems

[7] Judith Beck, "Dr. Aaron T. Beck," Beck Institute, https://beckinstitute.org/about/dr-aaron-t-beck/.

[8] Suma P. Chand, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," StatPearls, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/.

or schemas take shape as we go through life experiences. They are defined as templates or rules for information processing that underlie the most superficial layer of automatic thoughts."[9] Underlying beliefs are made up of an individual's core and intermediate beliefs. Core beliefs are those that center on one's view of the world and oneself. While intermediate beliefs are formed by assumptions made from the vantage point of core beliefs. By carefully observing and analyzing these components, Beck helped patients become more aware of themselves and began to change their thought patterns, seeking and engaging in more adaptive behaviors by addressing "underlying maladaptive beliefs about themselves, others, the world, and the future."[10]

After conducting the first major clinical trial, which compared CBT to antidepressant medication, Beck published the results in 1977 that made CBT the "first talk therapy to be as effective as medication for the treatment of depression and twice as effective in preventing relapse."[11] After a second clinical trial in the UK that had the same results, "over 2,000 studies have found CBT to be an effective treatment for many mental health challenges and medical problems with psychological components."[12]

Beck's work yielded many practices and forms of treatment.

> He developed instruments including the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) to measure

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[9] Suma P. Chand, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," StatPearls, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/.

[10] Suma P. Chand, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," StatPearls, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/.

[11] Suma P. Chand, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," StatPearls, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/.

[12] Suma P. Chand, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," StatPearls, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/.

> symptoms of psychopathology and evaluate the efficacy of treatment. CBT has been successfully applied to anxiety disorders, substance use, personality disorders, eating disorders, psychosis, and other psychiatric diagnoses.[13]

Based on the research done by Beck and the subsequent years of practice and clinical trials, one must conclude that CBT is a leading practice used to help individuals to recover from adverse and grievous experiences. In fact, his most recent adaptation to CBT is known as Recovery-Oriented Cognitive Therapy. CT-R is "a new psychotherapeutic modality based on the cognitive model that provides concrete, actionable steps to promote recovery and resilience."[14] "CT-R is formulated for individuals struggling the most with living their desired life. Practitioners sometimes view them as incapable of recovery."[15] CT-R offers individuals the tools to "become successful in overcoming obstacles and taking action toward their objectives, they learn new lessons that strengthen an adaptive set of beliefs."[16]

Interaction with Project Theme

When juxtaposed against the tenets of spiritual belief and specifically leadership within spiritual communities, it becomes clear that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a practice that would provide leaders with the help needed to lead through their own adverse and grievous experiences. Considering that CBT addresses one's inner thoughts

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[13] Suma P. Chand, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," StatPearls, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/.

[14] Suma P. Chand, "Cognitive Behavior Therapy," StatPearls, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK470241/.

[15] Aaron P. Brinen, "What Is CT-R," Recovery-Oriented Cognitive Therapy, https://recoverwithcbt.com/what-is-ct-r/.

[16] Aaron P. Brinen, "What Is CT-R," Recovery-Oriented Cognitive Therapy, https://recoverwithcbt.com/what-is-ct-r/.

and feelings about oneself and the world around them, spiritual leaders are often compelled to internalize those thoughts due to their responsibility to provide spiritual counsel to those they lead. They may thus never fully realize the damage done, which can lead to faulty leadership. The goal of CBT is for individuals who participate to make better decisions, thereby becoming an overall better person. Studies suggest that many spiritual leaders struggle with self-perception and self-esteem to the point of anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts and actions. Luke Geraty argues that "it's fairly common for many pastors to have self-esteem issues due to either the expectations they feel are *placed* on them or the expectations they place on *themselves*."[17] According to Geraty's argument, leaders often have automatic thoughts, cognitive distortions, and underlying beliefs that lead to unhealthy actions toward those that lead. It has great relevance to this project, particularly in the context of proper stewardship of gifts during times of grief.

Many church leaders find their identity in the ministry work they do and in the success of their ministry. This form of identity affirmation, which is controlled by success or failure in their church, comes with unforeseen and unfortunate consequences. "Church leaders develop creative ways to make excuses for what may or *may not* be evidence of church health and success."[18] These creative excuses lead to the components that make church leaders prime candidates for CBT. The waves of emotional and spiritual stress lead to impractical and damaging coping strategies that can cause irreversible

[17] Luke Geraty, "Pastoral Identity Crisis: Have You Built a Moat Around Yourself?," ChurchPlants, https://churchplants.com/articles/18137-pastoral-identity-crisis.html.

[18] Luke Geraty, "Pastoral Identity Crisis: Have You Built a Moat Around Yourself?," ChurchPlants, https://churchplants.com/articles/18137-pastoral-identity-crisis.html.

damage to the individual and their church. Religious coping is a concept that "refers to seeking religion as a means of strength in difficult times and includes reading holy scriptures, seeking counsel from religious leaders and decreasing distress or unpleasant thoughts using religious means."[19] This form of coping is one that has been passed down through generations, not just by church leaders but by Christians in general. God and the Bible serve as the ultimate authority on how we conduct ourselves and interact with the world. It informs what we do, what we say, what we believe, and how we act and react to experiences beyond the walls of the church. This type of coping, however, can be spilt into two distinct categories: negative and positive religious coping.

> Positive religious coping translates to a secure relationship with God and involves appraisal of obstacles in the light of God's providence. Negative religious coping, on the other hand, is maladaptive and interprets challenges as a result of punishment and divine dissent. Positive religious coping, however, has been shown to be less impactful on mental health as several studies have proved that negative religious coping had more merit in predicting anxiety and depression compared to positive religious coping.[20]

It is negative religious coping that creates the need for alternative avenues for church leaders to seek and find help in developing personal mental and spiritual practices to aid them in navigating ministry life. I believe that CBT provides leaders with the tools to develop mental practices and strategies that facilitate and foster positive coping mechanisms. Positive coping will result in more informed and grounded decision-making and leadership.

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[19] Benedict Francis et al., "Religious Coping, Religiosity, Depression and Anxiety among Medical Students in a Multi-Religious Setting," International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6352239/.

[20] Benedict Francis et al., "Religious Coping, Religiosity, Depression and Anxiety among Medical Students in a Multi-Religious Setting," International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6352239/.

Interaction with the Biblical Foundation

For Christian believers, the Bible serves as the ultimate authority on most topics, especially those topics related to spirituality and faith. It also provides guidance for life experiences related to health, relationships, stewardship, and wholeness, as many scriptures are dedicated to those topics. Mental health is also a topic that many believe has relevance within the biblical canon. For this project, we examined the life of Joseph in Genesis, focusing particularly on the conclusion of the narrative in Genesis 50:19-20. But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gn. 50:19-20).

These verses serve as the conclusion of a series of life experiences that Joseph endured because of exposing his gift of dream interpretation to his brothers. With envy in their hearts, they set in motion a series of events that could have led to Joseph developing some of those bad religious coping strategies that many of us practice. Instead, we find Joseph throughout the narrative making decisions that suggest he first had a healthy view of God and how God was active in his life. Secondly, he had to have a healthy view of himself, his gift, and his purpose. When facing unfavorable conditions, Joseph did not retaliate against those responsible for his circumstances but instead turned to his faith in God and his gift to help him endure those experiences. Joseph does have moments of weakness where he is overcome with emotion and weeps, but he does so in private. He does not allow those private moments of weakness to spill over into his public witness or his work. In the end, Joseph recognizes and shares that although those who sought to

harm him had ill intentions, God was able to use those same intentions not only to bring him to where he was destined to be but also to save the lives of many others.

Joseph does not minimize or ignore what happened to him; he acknowledges their actions against him. In the same setting, Joseph forgives and extends love to them. Joseph paints a vivid picture of what it looks like to assess and accept what has happened to you properly, but not allow that to dictate how you respond to the actions of those who took the action. Joseph shows a biblical example of what the results of CBT could be for the church leader. Assessing experiences absent of automatic thoughts, cognitive distortion, or underlying beliefs. Instead, he exhibits positive coping. "He knew that God had divinely planned and allowed him to suffer, but it was for his good and the good of his family. A divine perspective of life enabled him to be a forgiving person."[21] Here, Joseph does not fall into one of the problems addressed by CBT, rumination. Rumination is "thinking repetitively and recurrently about the causes and consequences of one's negative emotions and/or negative life-events."[22] This does not imply that Joseph did not think about what he experienced. In fact, CBT suggests that repetitive thought can be a positive action and "is a key part of the process by which we organize and integrate knowledge and experience."[23] This suggests that an individual can reflect on an experience multiple times to better assess and understand the experience and then respond to that experience positively. It is the difference between reacting and

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[21] Gary M. Barker, "'Joseph's Loving Forgiveness of His Brothers," The Paso Robles Press | Daily Paso Robles News, https://pasoroblespress.com/commentary/josephs-loving-forgiveness-of-his-brothers-by-dr-gary-m-barker/.

[22] Phyllis Kosminsky, "CBT For Grief: Clearing Cognitive Obstacles to Healing From Loss," *Journal of Rational-Emotive; Cognitive-Behavior Therapy* 35, no. 1 (May 19, 2016): 26–37, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10942-016-0241-3.

[23] Kosminsky, "CBT For Grief: Clearing Cognitive Obstacles to Healing From Loss," 26–37.

responding. “Responding, a spin off from the word responsibility, is considerate and deliberate. Reacting, on the other hand, literally means to meet one action with another one. It is immediate and rash.”[24] Leaders have a responsibility to respond positively to negative situations they face personally and ministerially. Joseph provides a biblical example of how to respond rather than react, and CBT seeks to aid individuals in developing the skills to do so. Skills that can affect the trajectory of their personal life and ministry. Reactionary leadership fosters conflict, whereas responsive leadership resolves it.

Interaction with Historical Foundations

Historically, individuals have experienced great traumas and grievous circumstances. There are countless stories of those individuals managing those experiences in positive ways. For this project, we used Horatio Spafford as a historical example. Spafford endures the loss of wealth and multiple children and somehow finds ways to help others while simultaneously enduring those hardships. Like Joseph in the Bible, Spafford drew on his faith in God and the purpose he believed he had to guide him through his trials. Spafford exhibits characteristics of individuals who underwent CBT long before CBT was established. When he received the news from his wife that his four daughters had all died in a shipwreck, Spafford made his way to Europe to meet his wife, who was onboard the ship as well. On the way to his wife, the captain of the ship told Spafford the very spot where the shipwreck occurred, the now grave of his four daughters. It was at that point Spafford wrote the famed hymn, “It is Well.” All of this

[24] Brad Stulberg, “A Simple Formula for Responding Not Reacting,” The Growth Equation, https://thegrowtheq.com/a-simple-formula-for-responding-not-reacting/.

was after seeing significant real estate investments burn in a great fire in Chicago, where he and his family lived.

Most therapists and psychologists would identify Spafford's loss of his daughters as complicated grief. "Complicated grief is like being in an ongoing, heightened state of mourning that keeps you from healing."[25] Spafford's losses took place within a small frame of time, so one could assume that while trying to cope with the loss of property, sending your wife and daughters to set up a new life for the family, receiving the news of his daughter's death, and then passing over the very spot where they lost their lives prevents him from healing from and processing his grief. Many therapists are:

> Advocating for the inclusion of complicated grief in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Psychiatric Disorders, have suggested that criteria include a prolonged bereavement period (at least 14 months after the death), with symptoms including intensive intrusive thoughts, severe emotion, distressing yearnings, feelings of excessive loneliness and emptiness, avoidance of people, places, or activities that remind the individual of the deceased, sleep disturbances, and maladaptive loss of interest in work, social, caretaking, or recreational activities.[26]

The emphasis that applies to Spafford is the prolonged period of bereavement. When experiencing multiple grievous situations, it becomes difficult to process what happened and take the necessary steps to properly grieve. CBT addresses cases like the Spafford's by providing enhancements to Psychodynamic Therapy. "Psychodynamic therapy focuses on the psychological roots of emotional suffering. Its hallmarks are self-reflection

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[25] Mayo Clinic Staff, "Complicated Grief," Mayo Clinic, https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/complicated-grief/symptoms-causes/syc20360374#:~:text=Complicated%20grief%20is%20like%20being,but%20your%20loved%20one's%20death.

[26] Sharon Butler and Terry B. Northcut, "Enhancing Psychodynamic Therapy with Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in the Treatment of Grief," *Clinical Social Work Journal* 41, no. 4 (June 22, 2012): 309–315, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-012-0406-1.

and self-examination."[27] The integration of CBT into PDT allows therapists "to help assess a client's cognitive thinking, provide urgently need symptom relief, promote learning in current problematical relationships, and jumpstart therapy and the therapeutic alliance when the client is not ready for or capable of, insight-oriented therapy."[28]

While CBT was not accessible during Spafford's time, his behavior resembles that of those who have participated in CBT. He was able to find a healthy outlet and continue to serve others through his own experiences without outwardly falling into depression. It becomes evident that Spafford was able to either block or avoid negative automatic thoughts, resist reacting with erroneous logic, and refrain from imposing personal prejudices on his suffering. Aiding others served as his positive coping strategy, which proved to bring him personal healing. He and his wife went on to establish a community where they provided the less fortunate with the resources needed to lead a good quality of life. He was able to continue his work because he did not let what he experienced deter him from his life's purpose: serving others. This project aims to guide leaders in a similar direction, finding purpose in challenging experiences to fuel purpose-driven leadership. Leading as and by example builds trust in those connected to the leader. Relatability is a key leadership trait the followers seek to connect with.

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[27] Jonathan Shedler, "The Efficacy of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy," *Psychodynamic Psychotherapy Research* 65 (November 23, 2011): 9–25, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-60761-792-1_2.

[28] Butler and Northcut, "Enhancing Psychodynamic Therapy with Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy in the Treatment of Grief," 309–315.

Interaction with Theological Foundation

The relationship between psychology and theology is reciprocal, as they both contribute to a deeper understanding of each other. Theology can be a valuable source for psychology and contributes to meaning-making as part of the recovery process. Theology offers a reflection on psychology, allowing for a deeper understanding of certain aspects of life.[29] As a human need, theology provides psychology with an understanding of and the philosophy behind that need. The ultimate need in theology is a need for man to acknowledge and connect with God. Some seek God to either prove or disprove God's existence, but believers seek God because they realize that God is the sole reason for their existence. Purpose, protection, and provision are just a few of the many things believers look to God for. This project seeks to shed light on an aspect of seeking God that centers around the meaning of suffering in our lives. The question of why God allows suffering is a major focus of many debates within theological and philosophical circles. We believe that suffering or evil entered the world because of sin, but that does not mean our suffering is a result of a sin we committed. To make sense of why we suffer, we must first accept that suffering is allowed by God and serves a purpose in our lives. We explored this idea through the lens of theodicy. Theodicy is a stream of thought within theology that examines the problem of evil and suffering in the world and then seeks to explain why God allows it.

This branch of theology merges with CBT at the intersection of acceptance and understanding. CBT guides individuals in finding meaning in their experiences, which

[29] Johan Waseberg, "The Dialogue Between Psychology and Theology," The American Association of Christian Counselors, https://aacc.net/2018/12/10/the-dialogue-between-psychology-and-theology/.

informs their responses to those experiences. Believers seek spiritual meaning and purpose in the face of suffering, and in a similar manner, CBT seeks to find meaning in suffering through emotional streams. This is where spirituality and emotionalism intersect. Spiritual suffering can have a profound emotional impact on an individual, much like emotional suffering can affect one's spirituality. I believe that the two work together as we navigate life. If not properly handling one or the other, an individual can experience periods of depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. Throughout history, "luminaries in the field of psychology, such as Freud and Charcot, envisioned religion as a pathology that indicated mental health problems in patients. For this reason, psychology avoided religion—and its less-formalized cousin, spirituality—for many decades."[30] Many argued that religion created mental health issues and should not be considered as a source of help for mental health. Today, however, "spirituality is a widespread (nearly universal) human trait that people approach in many ways but with the same goals. They wish to find meaning and value in everyday life, to make sense of life, and to connect themselves with something larger."[31]

> Spirituality can be helpful when a positive relationship to one's own beliefs and practices buffer the effects of a trauma and provide a source of comfort during times of distress. This beneficial relationship, sometimes referred to as spiritual support or positive religious coping, has been found to be generally related to better functioning after trauma, including posttraumatic growth.[32]

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[30] Mahoney A. Pargament, "Understanding Spirituality and Mental Health," McLean Hospital, https://www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/spirituality.

[31] Mahoney A. Pargament, "Understanding Spirituality and Mental Health," McLean Hospital, https://www.mcleanhospital.org/essential/spirituality.

[32] Sadie E. Larsen, Sarah Hopkins, and Irene Harris, "Va.Gov: Veterans Affairs," Addressing Religious or Spiritual Dimensions of Trauma and PTSD, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/txessentials/spirituality_trauma.asp.

It is said that what an individual believes directly affects how they behave. If this statement is true, it suggests that spirituality and emotional state must work hand in hand; otherwise, an individual would be considered unstable and unable to effectively lead within the faith community.

Conclusion

Pastor and provisional psychologist Sabrina Peters writes, "Emotionally unhealthy pastors have a tendency to leave a trail of chaos in their wake, causing harm to both the individuals and organizations they lead."[33] This chaos is left behind due to poor management of personal chaos. Leaders who fail to properly assess what they encounter will so make decisions steeped in anger, hurt, envy, and many other factors. This failure to confront underlying emotional dysfunction breeds a culture of dysfunction within the ministries they lead. Therefore, leaders must commit to emotional wholeness and mental stability with the same fervor as they pursue spiritual growth. CBT addresses these underlying dysfunctions by providing the individual with the tools necessary to develop new strategies for addressing them. Beyond prayer and other biblical methods, CBT offers proven clinical that work alongside biblical methods to allow for the safe confrontation of emotional traumas that an individual may face. The inability to process painful emotions and painful experiences results in clinical problems that will require clinical therapy.

These therapies cultivate traits that promote the development of the skills necessary for healthy emotional processing. Studies suggest that "emotional processing is

[33] Sabrina Peters, "Why the World Needs More Emotionally Healthy Pastors," Sabrina Peters, https://sabrinapeters.com/home/why-the-world-needs-more-emotionally-healthy-leaders.

a cognitive-affective continuum that broadly involves (1) being aware of emotions, (2) arousing and tolerating contact with them, (3) exploration and reflection to make sense of the emotional experience, and, finally, (4) transforming maladaptive emotions by accessing more adaptive ones."[34]

> CBT is based on the theory that the way individuals perceive a situation is more closely connected to their reaction than the situation itself. Individuals' perceptions are often distorted and unhelpful, particularly when they are distressed. Cognitive Behavior Therapy helps people identify their distressing thoughts and evaluate how realistic the thoughts are. Then they learn to change their distorted thinking. When they think more realistically, they feel better.[35]

The goal of this project is to provide resources for leaders within a ministry context that will enable them to develop not only as better leaders but also as better individuals. When an individual lacks a positive self-image, it leads to interpreting their life through those flawed views and making errors in judgment and decision-making. "Stigmatizing yourself because you have flaws is very dangerous. It will hurt you more than the actual flaws will."[36] While some would suggest that emotions should not inform decision-making, especially in a ministry context, "Without emotions to motivate and push us, we would be passive and do nothing. Our emotional state often informs decisions, as this is what emotions are designed to do. Emotions quickly condense an experience and evaluate it to inform our decision so we can rapidly respond to the situation."[37]

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[34] Patrícia Pinheiro et al., "Emotional Processing during the Therapy for Complicated Grief," *Psychotherapy Research* 32, no. 5 (October 18, 2021): 678–693, https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2021.1985183.

[35] Judith Beck, "Understanding CBT," Beck Institute, https://beckinstitute.org/about/understanding-cbt/.

[36] Mosab Alkhteb, "How Do You Feel about Your Flaws?" Medium, https://medium.com/theascent/how-do-you-feel-about-your-flaws-a6b400c4bb8f.

It then becomes imperative that leaders learn how to acknowledge, assess, process, and respond to emotions, especially those stemming from grievous experiences. It is perfectly fine, and some would say necessary, to lead with wounds; it is not wise to allow those wounds to bleed on those who we are charged to lead. "The notion of the wounded healer dates to antiquity. Plato, the father of Western philosophy, stated that the most skillful physicians, rather than being models of good health, are those who have suffered from all sorts of illnesses."[38] While Plato's words speak to physicians, I believe that the same can be true of spiritual leaders. Some of the most successful leaders are those who can guide people through periods of trauma and grief, having successfully navigated similar experiences themselves. With the help of God, perhaps a therapist, and CBT, leaders can lead the wounded while they are wounded and not cause more harm to themselves and others.

[37] Moshe Watson, "The Power of Emotions in Decision Making," Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-wisdom-of-anger/202308/the-power-of-emotions-in-decision-making.

[38] Serge Daneault, "The Wounded Healer: Can This Idea Be of Use to Family Physicians?," Canadian Family Physician Medecin de Famille Canadien, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2553448/.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Church leaders occupy a unique position within the church's structure. As such, they often serve as the first point of contact during times of crisis and are charged to offer spiritual guidance and practical support to church members. The responsibility to fulfill these and other ministerial obligations can be daunting and often overwhelming for the leader to navigate, especially when considering that a position as a church leader does not exempt one from facing grievous moments in life. When one views these truths and considers what it takes to accomplish the task, it becomes paramount that the leader is well-versed in how to manage and live through grief properly. Unfortunately, most leaders who have experienced grievous seasons in their lives often use their gifts to ignore the harm caused by these experiences rather than as a tool to help them find focus and properly navigate the grief. This is especially true if the grief is related to the ministry. Whether it is the loss of a dedicated staff member, the death of a beloved church member, or the visible decline in membership, ministry can evoke a type of grief that leaders will experience within their ministry context. This project was developed against the backdrop of the harsh and surprising reality that many leaders had never received discipline. Therefore, they are not well equipped to handle their moments of grief and trauma, making it almost impossible for them to guide members through theirs properly.

Sadly, many who are recognized as gifted early in life are thrust into roles within the church without the foundational work of discipleship. They then face life outside and even within the church and cannot navigate those times in a way that yields fruit. Instead, they develop habits and leadership styles or techniques that are more damaging than those that are developmental. This cycle creates a church filled with working but undisciplined members who continue the same cycle, with those who follow will eventually follow their leadership.

The question that arises is why this is such a significant problem within the church, especially when considering what some call the Great Commission that Jesus leaves for his disciples. In Matthew, chapter twenty-eight, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Jesus instructs His disciples to go into all the world and make disciples. After spending three years following Jesus and witnessing His works and how He managed challenges, they are empowered to go out and do likewise, making disciples. We have a biblical record to show that they did just that. However, they were only successful in doing this because Jesus spent three years preparing them or making them disciples so that they could then go and do the same. One cannot make disciples until one has first been made a disciple. It will be challenging for a church leader to create a culture of disciple-making when they have not properly discipled themselves. Thus, we have churches that may have a large congregation, but those in the pews and leadership do not possess the tools to go beyond the church walls to

make disciples as Jesus commanded. Even more frightening is to have a church full of un-discipled members who are looking to be discipled.

This cannot be accomplished by offering a weekly or monthly discipleship class. "Making disciples is helping people know Jesus Christ personally and adhere to His teachings. It is about coming alongside them, teaching them the ways of living a Christ-like lifestyle by the example we display in our own lives."[1] In short, making disciples is more about doing life with people than church. Many churches have the church aspect down to a science but fail miserably in making disciples. These churches are programmed and event-driven, offering several opportunities for worship and Bible study, but little to no thought or effort is put into discipleship. Leaders are often not equipped to navigate seasons of personal grief and then fail to steward the gifts they possess that enable them to lead effectively.

The failure to make disciples is not a failure of theology; we know what we're commanded to do. Rather, it is a failure of relational architecture. The modern, event-driven church has mastered the art of assembly-line ministry, prioritizing efficiency and scale over intimacy and depth. This preference for programming creates a precise set of systemic problems that actively block genuine discipleship.

Firstly, when church life is measured by the calendar (weekly services, quarterly events, annual retreats), it structurally limits the time and energy leaders have for the unplanned, messy, and time-consuming work of true discipleship. Discipleship happens best in the margins: over coffee, during a moment of crisis, or while

[1] Carl John Fechner, "Making Disciples - Why Is It Important? Christian Discipleship," Growing Deep and Strong, https://www.growingdeepandstrong.com/making-disciples-why-is-it-important-christian-discipleship/.

volunteering side-by-side. The current system, however, rewards the leader who can coordinate a successful event, not the one who spends an afternoon listening to a struggling member navigate their grief. This creates a vicious cycle: leaders are trained to be event managers, not life guides, leaving them ill-equipped for the deep, personal work that defines discipleship.

Another issue to be addressed is that we errantly practice the belief that discipleship can be achieved through a class. Offering a weekly class provides the illusion of equipping. It delivers information without requiring transformation. A leader can pass a biblical knowledge test yet remain utterly unprepared to handle the emotional intelligence required to lead a difficult board meeting or walk a family through terminal illness. As noted, leaders are often ill-equipped to navigate their own personal grief; how then can they steward the gifts to effectively guide others through theirs? The problem with this is not so obvious but widely present: We teach leaders what to do, but we fail to teach them who to be.

The result is a leadership cadre that appears outwardly strong and capable but is internally fragile. When personal tragedy inevitably strikes (grief, illness, marital strain), they have no relational scaffolding, no one doing life with them. They hide their struggles, modeling a kind of spiritual stoicism that is antithetical to the radical vulnerability modeled by Christ and required for authentic spiritual growth. This not only burns out the leader but also subtly teaches the congregation that discipleship is a classroom exercise, not a continuous process of messy, shared life.

To break this cycle, we must embrace a radical shift in organizational values, one that measures success not by attendance numbers, but by the measurable, relational depth

of its leaders and members. This change must begin with a personal commitment from those of us who hold the title of leader.

Methodology

The lessons, assignments, assessments, pre-course interviews, and exit surveys will be qualitative in nature. Participants will be evaluated based on their understanding of the content and intent to apply what they have learned from the sessions. Since personal and ministerial growth can only be proven over time and through observation, this project aims to serve as a starting point for that growth in the leaders and their respective ministries within the church.

Before beginning the project, an informal meeting was held between the church pastor and key leaders to determine the best way to recruit participants. At this meeting, the pastor recommended that an open call be made to the church's staff and all ministry leaders to determine who would be interested and available to participate. The pastor made it clear that he wanted a majority of them to participate because he felt the project would boost the morale of the staff and ministry leaders and hoped that it would spark a desire to continue the lessons after the project was completed. After the open call was made, a total of eighteen leaders responded and said they would participate. The eighteen volunteers who agreed to participate were contacted directly by the researcher to provide further details about what this project entailed. After these contacts were made, the number available changed from eighteen to ten. The ten who still agreed to participate were then added to an email list for further communication. This process was completed two weeks prior to the first class of the project being scheduled to take place.

A week before the first class of the project, participants were sent the required consent form, in compliance with school policy, along with a pre-survey containing three questions. These three questions aimed to discover what participants in the project believed or assumed about the project's basic tenets. The questions cover what it means to have a spiritual gift. The three questions were:

- What do you feel your spiritual gifts are?
- Do you know what it means to have a spiritual gift?
- What is your understanding of having and using spiritual gifts?

These questions were asked because the project's focal point is the leaders' ability or inability to steward their gifts through seasons of grief. To begin the project, it is essential to determine whether the participants understood what it meant to have spiritual gifts. An understanding of what they considered spiritual gifts and the responsibility that comes with them is foundational to carrying out this project. In previous research, it was discovered that many leaders within the church had accepted positions based on the need to fill a spot rather than their spiritual gifts. Some even admitted they did not know if they had spiritual gifts. They were unaware of spiritual gift assessments or had never been allowed to take the evaluation. These questions and more will then be explored in depth through a series of lessons, using scripture as the basis and drawing on the life of Joseph found in Genesis chapters thirty-seven to fifty. Practical information will also be used from the contents of the historical, theological, and interdisciplinary chapters of the project. The main topics will include Theodicy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and personal and spiritual devotion and discipline.

The survey served as an introduction to the project classes. Participants were given the same questions as a post-survey to gauge their answers for changes in understanding or belief. Since the project is qualitative, it would be essential to provide the researcher with data to determine whether the hypothesis is correct or needs adjustment. The participants agreed to take six classes over six to eight weeks. These classes would be set up as something other than a typical Bible study, but rather a group discussion-style teaching session. That is to provide space for participants to ask questions that may aid in furthering their understanding of the subject matter and help determine if the course material effectively offers helpful information for those participating. Considering the project's goal was to equip participants with the tools to take the necessary steps to gain a deeper understanding of how to steward their gifts through grief, it was essential that the foundational teaching was sufficient to inspire the leaders to continue the process.

The major topics of the project will be covered through a lesson taught by the researcher, followed by a group discussion based on the material covered. At the end of each session, except the final session, participants were given two or three take-home questions to answer and bring back to the following class. Participants were encouraged to be open, honest, and as detailed as needed to answer the questions fully. It was repeatedly emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers, as the purpose of the questions was to assess understanding and personal opinions on the subject matter. Those answers would serve to gauge the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the project itself. At the next class, participants would be asked if they wanted to share their answers with the class. Sharing those answers was not mandatory. Sharing answers could lead to more

group discussions or serve as a basis for introducing the next topic. The classes were designed in this way to encourage participants to engage and, in a sense, guide the lesson. While the content was prepared for presentation, participants would be more open to the material if they felt it addressed their needs.

At the end of the lessons, participants were given a post-survey with the same questions they answered in the pre-survey. This was done so that the researcher could determine if the material covered caused any changes in the participants' thinking and beliefs. This type of qualitative research can yield almost immediate observable results. Since the project's goal was to initiate a process that would be continued by the participants long after the sessions were over, there needed to be a way to gauge whether the process had begun.

Overall, the methods used in this project aim to gauge changes, or lack thereof, in thought concerning discipleship among leaders, how they have handled or mishandled specific life experiences, and how those experiences shape their leadership approach within their respective ministries. These methods would best serve that purpose, considering the project's ultimate goal. While they may not completely correct or change the thoughts and responses of participants, they would, in some way, get participants to consider alternative means to address and respond to situations they are currently facing or may face later in life.

Implementation

After considering the methodology for this project, careful attention was given to the project's implementation. The course materials and other items were carefully crafted

with the project's end goal in mind, as well as practicality for those who agreed to participate. The project aimed to initiate a spiritual development and discipleship process that would ultimately lead to improved leadership practices among ministry leaders at St. John Church Unleashed. Each week, the participants would be presented with a lesson connected to the project's overall theme. These lessons, although separate, were carefully planned to create a cohesive and concise theme that participants could grasp and retain. A theme that prompted participants to reflect on their personal lives and discipleship.

The project took place at the St. John Church's Grand Prairie location. This location was selected because it is where most of the church's weekly events and meetings occur and serves as the hub for all ministry leaders. The project was set to begin February 12, 2025, and end on March 19, 2025. Each week, a lesson would be given, and participants would be asked to answer two journal questions and return the following week. Those who agreed to participate would be contacted by email by the researcher to request the necessary materials before the classes began. This included a consent form and a pre-survey. The materials were sent to participants, and they were asked to complete the consent form and email it back to the researcher. Each participant submitted a completed consent form prior to the commencement of the first lesson.

The first session served as an introduction to the project's overall theme. The objective was to discover what it means to properly steward one's gift(s) to foster personal and ministerial growth. To fully understand the content of the other lessons and how they were connected, the first lesson covered discipleship, what it is and is not, and the idea of spiritual gifts and their purpose in the church. The session opened with the question, "What does it mean to be discipled?" The participants were encouraged to take

a minute to consider the question and write their answers down. After this, the lesson covered the idea of discipleship as groups of people doing life together rather than a class. The idea was to express that it would be difficult to make a disciple if one were never made a disciple.

Participants were then asked, “What does it mean to be gifted?” After being given time to write down their answers, the lesson shifted to discuss what spiritual gifts were and how they were to be used and stewarded. The overall idea was that gifts are unique skills God gives to serve a unique purpose. This concept was further explained to participants, who were told that leaders have a responsibility to properly steward gifts by discovering, developing, and distributing them. While someone may not request gifts, they are responsible for properly managing them. After the lesson, participants were given two questions to answer outside of the class and return the following week. Those questions were “Do you feel you were properly discipled?” and “Do you believe you have stewarded your gifts properly?”

Of the ten participants present at the first lesson, seven expressed that they did not feel they were disciplined. One response, in particular, stood out as one participant stated:

> I’ve been in church for as long as I can remember, and I’ve always been encouraged to participate in church, but I was hardly ever instructed on how to live when I left church. This became a problem for me when I discovered that people in church lived differently at home than they portrayed at church. No one showed me how to live, but they showed me how to have church.

This response spoke to the initial thought that this entire project was born from, the idea that an overwhelming number of ministry leaders in the church today had not been properly discipled. In this small group alone, this meant that seventy percent of active

ministry leaders in the church felt they had never been discipled but were given positions and were responsible for discipling others.

The second week's session began with participants submitting their journal questions from the previous week. All ten participants returned for the second week and turned in their answers. The topic of the second lesson was the life of Joseph from Genesis chapters thirty-seven to fifty. The life of Joseph was used as a biblical example of what stewarding gifts looked like. The lesson's objective was for participants to understand that properly stewarding would keep a person from succumbing to grief. Joseph experienced a life of grievous periods that started with him exposing his gift. However, that same gift would sustain him during those periods and ultimately lead him to a position of power where he could utilize his talents to serve others.

Along with Joseph, the lesson covered Horatio Spafford, who wrote the hymn "It Is Well" after going through a series of grievous episodes in his personal life. After those experiences, not only did he write the hymn, but he and his wife also founded a community to support those facing a variety of life challenges. The overall point of this lesson was to highlight that while challenges will come in life, God gives spiritual gifts to help navigate those challenges and then help to serve others who may be facing some of the same challenges. Some participants expressed during the discussion that they were starting to understand the idea of stewarding gifts better. One participant asked, "So if I'm gifted to teach, then should I find teachable things in the things that I go through?" This question led to a brief discussion that ended with the instructor stating, "Joseph teaches that it's better to rest and reflect before you respond or retaliate."

The participants were reminded to answer two journal questions and return them to the next week's class. Those questions were, "What do you do when sharing what God gives you leads to circumstances that feel like God left you?" and "What if your gift is the cause and cure for every situation you face?" These questions stemmed from the lesson's content on Joseph and Horatio Spafford, which highlighted the idea that God often gives us what we need to overcome the trouble that He allows us to face. Ministry leaders will frequently face challenges in their personal lives and will also be faced with the challenge of leading others through similar challenges. It becomes increasingly important for leaders to understand that the same gifts that help them navigate challenges are the same gifts that will enable them to guide others.

The following week's lesson was attended by nine of the ten participants who agreed to participate in the project. The lesson topic was "Theodicy: Why Does God Permit Suffering?" This topic was chosen to complement the previous lessons, as leaders need to understand what suffering is and why God permits it. The lesson's objective was to understand that suffering is just as God-given as gifts. Therefore, the leader needs to steward suffering properly. The lesson went into a discussion about the Ontological Argument, a concept that seeks to prove the existence of God. Those in opposition to the existence of God use suffering as one of their arguments to disprove His Existence. Those against the existence of God argue that an all-loving, caring, and knowing God would not allow those who believe and consider to be His children would not allow those same people to suffer. A counterargument was addressed, specifically the concept of Teleology. Teleology is the study of purposes, goals, ends, and functions. This idea suggests that instead of looking back for an explanation of causation, one should look

forward to an explanation of purpose. In other words, one should focus more on why than they are suffering and what they are suffering from. The argument was made that God's purpose is in suffering.

During this session, participants seemed to be more reflective than responsive. One participant became visibly emotional while discussing suffering and asked to be excused from the room. The entire class took a moment to pause and reflect. It highlighted that we all experience suffering, and those experiences can have long-lasting emotional and spiritual implications. If not managed properly, it could cause irreparable damage to the life of the one facing the suffering. The participant who left the room returned and asked to speak. They expressed that at that moment, they relived a moment of suffering and realized that they had responded in an unhealthy way. They asked the class to pray for the restoration of a relationship that had been severed during the suffering.

At the end of this lesson, participants were given two more questions to answer and return for the next week. The questions were "What do you think is the purpose for some of the things you suffered in your life?" and "Can you recall a time when you allowed suffering to cause you to make others suffer?" These questions were based on the content of the lessons up to this point. Suffering is a universal concept that can be seen through many lenses. Still, ministry leaders need to have a biblical and theological understanding of suffering to help make sense of it and guide congregants through their own experiences of suffering.

Eight of the ten who agreed to participate in the project attended the next lesson. Those in attendance submitted their answers to the journal questions, and one of the two who were absent sent their answers via email. The topic of this week's lesson was

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. This lesson was based on the interdisciplinary chapter of this program. CBT is a branch of psychotherapy. It is a form of psychological treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug use problems, marital problems, eating disorders, and severe mental illness. The focus of CBT is for individuals to identify and correct negative thought patterns and behaviors that cause emotional distress. By discovering and developing healthier coping strategies, CBT provides individuals with tools to challenge negative beliefs about themselves and their experiences. This form of therapy is short-term and goal-oriented and has proven to be highly effective in managing symptoms, thereby improving overall well-being and quality of life.

This topic was important to the overall project because it explores the psychoanalytical aspect of human thinking that all humans share. The way thoughts are processed directly influences how a person then responds. As leaders in the church, they must have the tools needed to process what happens to them correctly and respond to those events appropriately around them. CBT guides individuals to find meaning in their experiences, informing how they react to those experiences. Believers seek spiritual meaning and purpose in the face of suffering, and in a similar manner, CBT aims to find meaning in suffering through emotional processing. This is where spirituality and emotionalism intersect.

Three aspects of CBT were outlined and explained to participants. Those aspects were automatic thoughts, cognitive distortions, and religious coping. These three are related to the project's overall theme in that they address some of the flawed thinking habits that leaders may have. Habits that lead to making decisions founded in

misunderstandings and misperceptions make it difficult to make proper decisions. Participants were asked if they had ever heard of CBT, but no one had. They were also asked if they believed they were guilty of some of the examples given in the lesson, and all of them said they had been guilty of at least one.

At the end of this lesson, participants were given three questions to answer and return. The questions were "What Automatic Thoughts or Cognitive Distortions do you believe you as a ministry leader suffer with?" "Have you negatively used religious coping? If so, what was the result?" and "After hearing about this theory, does it create an interest in seeking professional help in this area?"

The final session of the project was a wrap-up session. All ten who agreed to participate in the project attended this lesson. At this time, participants were given a post-survey to answer the same three questions they answered in the pre-survey. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they may have had about any of the previous lessons. There were three questions asked.

The first question asked was, "If I feel that I'm operating from a bad place spiritually, as it relates to discipleship, how should I go about addressing it?" there was a brief discussion around this question in which it was stated that the church does not give space for leaders to express how they feel they are not in a good space, spiritually, without being judged or removed from their positions. This also led to a discussion about leaders not feeling comfortable being transparent with other leaders about their own deficiencies as leaders. The next question asked was about the connection between therapy and theology. A participant asked, "Is it really okay for a spiritual leader to seek therapy?" This question led to a brief discussion in which it was stated that God gives

therapists the gift of understanding the human mind and behavior in a way that can aid in spiritual development and maturity. The goal of the project was for leaders to take steps toward seeking professional help; therefore, this question was discussed in more depth, with the backdrop of previous lessons. It was also highlighted that the St. John church has a counseling center that could provide help with seeking therapy of any kind.

The final question was, “Is it ever too late for someone to be discipled?” One of the participants responded to this question and said that he informed his wife that he wanted to talk to the pastor about his desire to step aside from his position to seek God and be discipled. He stated that he felt that he was not adequately equipped to disciple someone. It was then discussed that the church may suffer greatly when leaders are not mature enough to admit they do not feel equipped to carry out the tasks they have been given.

The session concluded with a prayer by Pastor Denny Davis, who explained that he had not attended the previous sessions because he did not want participants to feel restricted in their expression. He expressed that he was excited to hear about the results, hoping that they would lead to growth in the leaders, which in turn would result in progress in the ministries at the church.

The original plan was for the classes to be six weeks long, but due to one week being missed because of severe weather, one of the lessons was divided into parts and taught over the last two sessions. The session's topic was based on the lack of discipleship in the church. It was a combination of the idea that leaders were not discipled and how current culture has moved from a communal to a more selfish way

of life. The subject matter was covered without significant changes from the original project proposal.

Summary of Learning

The class sessions of this project at the St. John Church Unleashed introduced participants to the idea that leaders needed to be exposed to concepts that would aid them in personal discipleship and lead them to individual and ministerial growth. The hypothesis stated that if leaders of the church participate in a six-week study on stewarding gifts through grief, those leaders will exhibit leadership skills that will foster both personal and ministerial growth. The classes, surveys, journal questions, and group discussions encouraged participants to explore within themselves and confront truths about themselves that they may have kept silent for years. Additionally, the classes created and the environment made it possible for participants to ask questions that they may have previously felt they did not have a space to ask. Based on journal entries and surveys, the most significant takeaway from this project was that leaders who participated thought they had a foundation they could build upon in relation to their discipleship and felt the need to take on the responsibility of furthering the learning from these classes.

This truth was evident in the changes in participants' responses to the initial survey questions from the project's beginning to its end. Seven of the ten participants had changes to their answers. This ranged from one participant saying they did not have a clear understanding of having and using a spiritual gift to them saying that they feel they have a sense of what their spiritual gifts are and what they should be used for to another participant saying they knew what their spiritual gifts were to say they felt they

misjudged what their gifts are and how they have not been used correctly. These surveys suggested that seventy percent of participants thought they had a new or better understanding of their role as a ministry leader and their responsibilities as leaders. Some participants learned that they were not taught incorrectly but rather that they were not taught how to apply what they had been taught. While they were aware of spiritual gifts, they were not taught how to use and steward them, especially during times of grief in their personal lives.

The group discussion revealed that many in ministry yearned for a space to express themselves without fear of judgment or repercussions. Many have experienced hurt and trauma that they have never expressed to anyone, but it has a way of showing how they managed crises in their personal lives and the church. Four participants admitted through journaling that they felt they had caused damage to others because of damage within themselves. Many of the issues in ministries within the church can be traced back to a leader who made a decision that created negative responses from followers, ultimately leading to division within the ministry. These discussions also revealed that many had questions they felt had never been answered, as those they asked did not know the answer and were afraid to admit it. One of the often-unspoken realities of leadership is that many leaders may not realize when they lack answers to questions, fearing they will appear inadequate to their followers. However, this can lead to them giving answers not founded on biblical truth and cause others to believe in error. Many in the church equate uncertainty with a lack of faith. And a lack of faith in the church is strongly frowned upon. An overly spiritualized idea of what leaders should be able to do creates unspoken rules and standards that leaders strive to live up to but never fully

reach. This causes mental frustration that can lead to burnout, causing many to leave leadership altogether.

The journal entries provided answers to questions that showed that the content was being received, understood, and, in some instances, applied by the participants. A few of the responses from participants revealed that they were introduced to new concepts that helped them make sense of many things they had been seeking answers to in their lives. One participant expressed that they did not feel they were stewarding their gifts properly and believed they were thrust into leadership without any training. It has caused more damage than development in the ministry they lead. However, after the classes, they believed they understood the concept that would help them correct some bad ministry habits. While these corrections may not produce immediate results, they can lead to gradual and sustainable change within those ministries.

One of the most shocking responses submitted was that a participant felt scripture had been misused to grant permission to a leader to mishandle personal hurt and, in turn, cause harm. They did not provide details but stated that, because of that experience, they were overly reliant on scripture to advise followers and felt that it ultimately made those followers more confused. During the session about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, they were convicted because they had told a member of the church that they should pray and rely on scripture and not allow society to tell them that science can help with spiritual matters. They expressed that religious coping was their "go-to technique" to avoid looking unlearned in other areas. They felt that if they could quote and give scripture, it would make them "look good" in the eyes of those who look to them for leadership.

Ultimately, the participants felt that the classes covered subject matter that they needed and would use going forward in their ministries. They expressed that the content helped them make sense of most of the challenges they faced before the classes began. Unfortunately, ministry leaders often feel that they cannot express moments of weakness or uncertainty because of how others, including their followers, would view them. "Measuring progress shows you're moving in the right direction." Too often, leaders compare their progress to that of other leaders, which can discourage them. Galatians 6:4-5 says, "Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load."[2] This creates a cycle of unaddressed and untreated trauma that creates poor leadership habits that lead to poor ministries. Poor leadership habits can render ministries ineffective and ultimately lead to their demise.

According to the answers submitted and discussed, the hypothesis of this project was supported. While the changes may not be immediately apparent, the results suggest that they are being implemented, and leaders are taking steps to see these changes come to full fruition in their personal lives and ministries at the church. It is also evident that the leaders who participated suggest that other leaders go through the classes so that these changes can be seen throughout the church. The results could foster a culture of change and healthy leadership habits within the church, which can be shared with the next generation of leaders. The church dies without a generation to take on the mantle and mandate. It should be the goal of all ministry leaders to prepare someone to continue the work they set out to do. However, if no work is being done, then there is nothing to pass

[2] Kent Ingle, "The Imperfect Leader," Influence Magazine, https://influencemagazine.com/en/Practice/The-Imperfect-Leader.

down. What each leader should want to pass down, then, are healthy habits that produce a healthy ministry.

Continued growth is based on continued learning and changes. *"The purpose of learning is growth, and our minds, unlike our bodies, can continue growing as we live."*[3] As culture shifts, the church must position itself to keep up with the changes—not to change to be like the culture, but to change and provide a biblical way for believers to live within it. It could be argued that the church should lead the charge regarding culture. Unfortunately, society today has lost its level of respect and reverence for the church. This is not necessarily due to the culture but because the church has seemingly decided to take the backseat and remain silent on key societal issues. This would require the church to produce leaders who see beyond the now and venture to address the future. One way is to provide leaders with the tools to develop themselves and then guide those who follow them in their own development. Unfortunately, this project revealed that many leaders are clinging to outdated beliefs and practices that have hindered the church's progress in discipleship. As a result, members are often left to find ways to cope with life outside the church using methods that do not align with their Christian values and principles. This is possible because leaders are not equipped to equip them properly.

Conclusion

The project's goal was not to provide these leaders with all the tools they needed to be completely healed and whole but to initiate a process that they would be responsible for continuing long after the classes. The goal was to get them to acknowledge that there

[3] Craig Ruvere, "The Purpose of Learning Is Growth Which Can Change the World," Craig Ruvere, https://craigruvere.com/the-purpose-of-learning-is-growth-which-can-change-the-world/.

was a problem and to have sufficient understanding and motivation to take the necessary steps to correct it. The leaders who participated in this project took the first step to address the issues that may have been present throughout their ministry tenure. They admitted that they were either not discipled or discipled improperly or were unaware of how that lack of discipleship affected their leadership. If this is true for St John's Church, it is potentially true for just about every church operating today. They also admitted that they needed a deeper understanding of how to manage their grief and steward the gifts they have been given through their grief. Instead of finding ways to hide and cover their issues, they desire the tools and help to navigate grief in ways that cause them to grow from those grievous episodes. They now know that they need to seek help and guidance on how to lead through grief.

The church must take a serious look at how leaders are trained, developed, and placed in leadership positions. There seems to be a disconnect between the biblical mandate of making disciples and the practical outworking of that mandate within local church contexts. Many leaders are well-intentioned and genuinely desire to serve God and His people. However, good intentions and zeal are not enough to equip someone for the complexities of ministry, especially when navigating the storms of life. A more holistic approach is needed, one that combines theological knowledge with practical skills, emotional intelligence, and a deep commitment to ongoing discipleship. The church must prioritize discipleship, not just as a program or a class but as a way of life. Discipleship is about walking alongside individuals, modeling Christ-like behavior, and offering guidance and support as they deepen their faith. It is a relational process that

requires time, patience, and intentionality. Leaders must first be discipled before they can effectively disciple others.

The findings of this project, while rooted in the experience of the leaders at St. John's Church, have landed with a personal, unavoidable gravity on my own ministry consciousness. The disconnect between the biblical mandate of discipleship and its practical application is not merely a theoretical flaw in an organizational chart; it is a wound in the body of Christ that I, too, have carried and, frankly, perpetuated. To be precise, my own leadership tenure has not been immune to the very flaws this analysis diagnoses.

For too long, I, like many well-intentioned leaders, prioritized competence over character, output over inner health, and public strength over private processing. The culture of ministry often implies that the leader must be the unflappable pillar—the one who offers comfort but never seems to need it. This expectation, which I internalized, led to an unintentional but profound isolation. I operated under the assumption that demonstrating vulnerability about my own grief, my lack of robust discipleship, or my struggle to steward a difficult season would be a sign of weakness that could compromise my authority. The precise consequence of this posture was that I was not merely an unhealthy leader; I was an inauthentic model for the very people I was charged with guiding.

This project, therefore, became a crucible for my own spiritual inventory. Observing the St. John’s leaders admitting their need for deeper support in navigating grief was not just an analytical point; it was a mirror. It forced me to acknowledge the times I, too, had sought to “hide and cover [my] issues” instead of seeking tools for

growth. The power in their admission lay not in its sadness, but in its radical transparency, a quality that must now define the next phase of my leadership journey and, I argue, the future of church leadership as a whole.

The personal precision I now embrace is this: The leader cannot truly teach what they have not personally submitted to. To advocate for a holistic, discipleship-first model is now to commit myself, publicly and privately, to that same rigorous, often uncomfortable, process of ongoing growth. The goal of the project—initiating a process that leaders must continue—is now my personal charter. The journey of healing and wholeness is not a destination for my congregants alone; it is the defining work of my life and ministry, and I intend to pursue it with the same commitment to precision and accountability that I have asked of the participants in this study. This commitment must now translate into a precise, actionable vision for systemic change, moving beyond mere acknowledgment to the hard work of institutional reform.

The analysis has pinpointed the disease: a lack of intentional, holistic discipleship that equips leaders to be whole people before they are placed on a platform. The preceding section detailed the personal conviction required to address it. Now, the concluding task is to offer a precise vision for implementing the necessary transformation, moving from the general mandate to specific, measurable action. Perhaps the vision is long, and the commitment is immense, but the potential for transformation is exactly what Jesus envisioned when He issued the Great Commandment. When leaders are discipled to be healthy, whole, and radically transparent about their ongoing need for grace, they move from being mere administrators of a church to being authentic models of the Christ-life. This is how St. John's, and indeed the greater Church, will

fulfill its mandate—by cultivating disciples who know how to grow from their wounds and, therefore, can truly guide others to do the same. The process starts, precisely and personally, with the health of the leader.

By addressing these areas, the church can equip its leaders to navigate the storms of life, thrive in their midst, and guide others through them with grace and compassion. The task is excellent, and the journey is long, but the potential for transformation is immense. When leaders are healthy, whole, and well-equipped, the entire church is strengthened, and the mission of making disciples is advanced. The great commandment of the church given by Jesus can only be fulfilled when those in the church know how to make disciples. A disciple can then go and make disciples.

APPENDIX A

SERMON

“Look At It This Way”

Genesis 50:19-20

19 But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?

20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

I don’t have a large quantity of friends, but the few I do have are quality friends. They are always pushing me to be and do better. When I show signs of slack, they encourage me in their own ways to pick myself up and get to it. One friend in particular really gets to me, though. When I call with my issues, this friend always has a way of turning the conversation to make me see that what I’m complaining about really isn’t as bad as I’m making it to be. I’ll run down what is bothering me and this friend, without fail, will start their rebuttal with these words, “Well Look at it this way.” Then proceed to share with me valid reasons why what I’m complaining about really isn’t worth complaining about.

I asked this friend why they always lead their rebuttals to my complaints with that phrase. This friend put on a grin and said, “Well I just try to look at things from other perspectives to hopefully find the good in it.”

While their response was more than enough, my curiosity got the better of me. I wanted to explore this phrase further.

Here’s what I discovered.

"Look at it this way" is a phrase most commonly used to **reframe a situation** or an argument, often to offer a new perspective or a different interpretation. It's a way of saying, "consider this alternative viewpoint."

This phrase is commonly used when:

- **You're trying to simplify a complex problem**: You can break down a difficult idea into a more understandable component.
- **You're trying to convince someone of something**: It can be used to present a compelling argument by highlighting a benefit or a logical conclusion they may not have considered.
- **You're trying to offer comfort**: You might use it to help someone see a silver lining in a negative situation.

Essentially, it's **a conversational tool for shifting someone's mental framework from one way of thinking to another, typically to help them understand, agree with, or feel better about something.**

This discovery of the meaning and depth of this phrase caused me to engage in my own personal theological debate.

How much Spiritual Sustenance do we forfeit at the altar of Natural Negativity?

How much of God's Work goes unappreciated because of Man's focus on the enemy's attempts?

The truth of the matter is, too often we allow what we face in life horizontally to taint and tint our vertical perspective. In other words, we really can't see how blessed we are because we are too focused on what we don't think is a blessing.

Life has a way of teaching us that spiritual growth is not life absent from trouble but rather in the presence of abundant difficulty.

All Life Experiences are Learning Experiences.

- You discover what you know after you realize you didn't know.
- You discover who you are in times when you can't seem to figure out who you are.
- You discover ability in seasons that make you feel unable.
- You discover the direction to take when your life seems directionless.

The book of Genesis offers the narrative of the life of Joseph, a man who, from an early age, endured many tough seasons in life but ended his life with the spiritual maturity to view life's happenings with the proper perspective. From Genesis 37 to Genesis 50, we find Joseph going from trouble to trouble.

Joseph's story in Genesis begins as the favored son of Jacob, marked by his coat of many colors. His brothers, jealous of his dreams and their father's love, sold him into slavery in Egypt. Despite betrayal and hardship, which included being falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown into prison, Joseph remained faithful to God, and God gave him favor. Through interpreting dreams, Joseph rose from prisoner to second-in-command under Pharaoh, entrusted with preparing Egypt for a coming famine.

If anyone had the right to be down about life, Joseph had all the reasons.

- Family betrayal.
- False accusations.
- Imprisonment.

And yet at the end of his narrative, Joseph faces the very brothers who sold him into slavery, and instead of understandable retaliation, he makes a declaration, "What you meant for evil, God meant for good."

Joseph's focus on making good on his God-given gift allowed him to manage trouble properly.

He stewarded his gift through grief and didn't allow grief to stunt his growth.

What does the narrative of Joseph's life teach the believer?

Thesis: Spiritual Discipline and Maturity cause the believer to properly view Life's Meaning in relation to Life's Moments.

In other words, a high view of purpose will cause you to see the purpose of even the lowest predicaments in life.

1. **View of Self v.19**

When his brothers, who had once betrayed him and sold him into slavery, showed up and recognized Joseph, they became afraid, thinking that he would retaliate. Instead, Joseph responds, "fear not, am I in the place of God?"

His response is what I'd like to call a Rhetoric Demonstrative." That is, he raises a question that doesn't require an answer because those he asked already knew the truth. They knew he was not God.

Joseph, while in a position to determine if they are fed, is not in a position to decide their fate. Their life belonged to the one who gives life.
This level of maturity should be the goal of all believers, a healthy view of their position when juxtaposed against God.

Joseph demonstrates that while he can be and provide resources, he is not the ultimate source of life. HE was only in a position to give out what God had allowed them to take in during the famine.

While Joseph knew his position, his response also prevented them from placing him higher than what he was. Too often, people allow others' opinions to foster a lofty and ungodly attitude about themselves. One must free oneself from the responsibility that belongs to God, even when those around you feel you are god-like in their lives.

It is easy to allow one's position to create a God complex within them.

2. **View of Suffering v. 20**

Joseph says those now popular words that can be found quoted quite often in most churches. "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." He highlights that he had a healthy and positive understanding of why he suffered.

He understands that the plot against him was ultimately in God's plans for him. Life had taught him that suffering has benefits that can only be obtained if you suffer right.

There's a right way to handle being wronged.

And you can have the same attitude when you understand that what is against you is usually the means to advance you.

You wouldn't move forward without the frustration.

You wouldn't go higher without them trying to bring you low.

You wouldn't grow with the dirt and grime they throw at you.

God always makes good use of bad circumstances.

It's an Old Testament picture of a New Testament scripture: Romans 8:28 "And we know all things work together for the good of them that love the Lord and are called according to his purpose."

Divine Destiny will unfold as Divinely Intended.

3. **View of Salvation v. 20**

"To save many alive"

Joseph expresses that his suffering was so that others could be saved. God spared him in his situation to save others in theirs. Had God not spared him, perhaps his brothers and others throughout the land would've never received food in the famine.

It reminds the believer that often, our hurt is helpful to others. Our testimony gives hope in their tests. Our suffering could save them.

Again, this acts as an Old Testament preview of a New Testament event. Jesus would endure the brutality of the cross so that we could be saved.

That's why Isaiah said, "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by his stripes we are healed."

That's why the hymnologist would pen these words:

Wounded for me, wounded for me,
Wounded for me, He was wounded for me.

Gone my transgressions and now I am free,
All because Jesus was wounded for me.

Dying for me, dying for me,
Dying for me, He was dying for me.
Gone my transgressions and now I am free,
All because Jesus was dying for me.

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